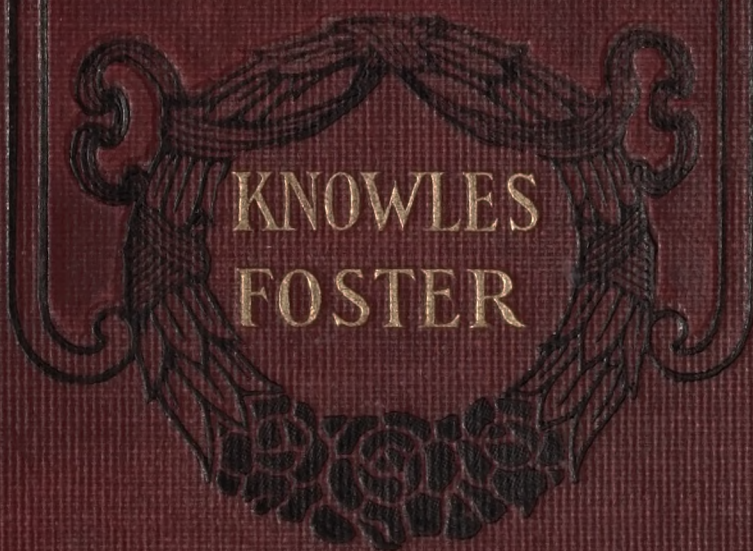
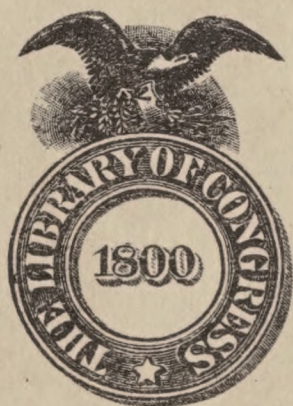


JEHANNE
OF THE
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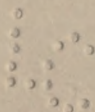
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JEHANNE OF THE GOLDEN LIPS

JEHANNE OF THE GOLDEN LIPS

BY

FRANCES G. KNOWLES-FOSTER



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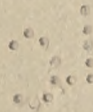
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Albert Adsit Clemons

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

It will be observed that I have used the French spelling of most of the proper names in this story, but it must be remembered that the French and Provençal element was almost as strong as the Neapolitan, at this Anjevine Court, and according to the Chronicles Queen Jehanne's love for most things French was very great.

All the details are drawn from both Neapolitan and Provençal contemporary documents, and save that I have taken the liberty of making Queen Jehanne absent from Naples after the murder, the historical facts have been very closely adhered to, in every particular.

The manuscript of my story was written and completed in 1905-6, but owing to my long absences in India, Burma, and Egypt, its publication has been delayed until the present year.

JEHANNE OF THE GOLDEN LIPS

HISTORICAL FOREWORD

KING ROBERT I. of Naples, the Two Sicilies, King of Jerusalem, Prince of Capua, and Count of Provence, surnamed the Wise, ascended his throne A.D. 1309. He was twice married, but of his children by his first Queen, Violante of Aragon, only one son survived, and his second wife, Sancia of Majorca, died childless. This son, Charles, Duke of Calabria, "the Just and Illustrious," married Princess Marie de Valois, of the French Royal House; and when he was thirty the Florentines prayed him to come and assist their city in one of its little wars. In the Arno's swamps he caught a fever whereof he died, leaving twin daughters and a broken-hearted wife, who soon followed her husband to the grave.

King Robert was the more stricken, because his son's death meant the crown passing eventually to his brother Jean, Duke of Durazzo, or, failing him and his sons, to the King's other brother, Philippe, Prince of Taranto—for all of whom King Robert had scant liking.

Hence he got together all his barons and made them swear fealty to Jehanne, the eldest little girl, and, in default of her succession, to Marie, the younger.

A year or two later he arranged after the fashion of the times a child-marriage for Jehanne with Prince Andrea, brother to King Ludwig of Hungary. This took place by proxy in 1333, when both children were about seven. Jehanne grew up in the hot south, a true daughter of the sun, strong willed, fiercely impulsive, with all the culture and refinement which the most brilliant Court of Europe could give her; while Andrea was reared in sterner, rougher Hungary, by a cold, pious mother, Queen Elisabeth. She, as if to crush out any frivolity which might survive her influence, turned him over to a bigoted monk, one Friar Robert of Milletto, with the natural result that Andrea, always a dull, serious child, grew up dogmatic and sober as any cloister-reared novice. When, in 1342, he came to Naples to claim his young bride, with his following of fierce boiars (who scorned the Neapolitans for popinjays), he took immediate umbrage at her joyous gaiety; and this feeling, dating from the very moment she met him, all splendid in white and gold, at Porta Capuana, grew from mere dislike, to fiercer fires.

In a short space King Robert realised his mistake, and that he must take prompt steps to preserve his adored grandchild's power.

He called a Council, and drew up his will, whereby he excluded Andrea entirely from the throne (save as Prince Consort); and even as Prince Consort he stipulated that he must do homage to Jehanne for his Duchy of Calabria, and principality of Salerno. The counties of Provence, Piedmont, and the Duchy of Apulia Jehanne held as her private property apart from the crown. Thus Andrea became a powerless cypher, and she had control of all her grandsire's

lands and gold ; but until she was twenty-five King Robert appointed a Council of Regency, headed by the mighty Lord Geoffredo Marzano, Count of Squillace, High Admiral of Naples, and Philippe de Cabassolle Bishop of Cavaillon, the famous scholar, the friend of Petrarch, a man with saintly soul yet stately skill. But Jehanne had power to dissolve the regency and take the helm earlier, but only with their unanimous consent—which the astute old King thought they would never give.

Then King Robert, very aged and weary of this world, calmly quitted it in 1343, leaving behind him the materials for a political earthquake, for the will had been kept secret from the Hungarians, and there was consternation in Andrea's party.

Andrea and Jehanne, now they need no longer feign amity to soothe the old King's troubled mind, soon had open disputes.

The old Queen-Mother came from Buda to Naples armed with much money and more spite to subdue her refractory daughter-in-law, but uselessly. She spat angry words, Jehanne shrugged ; Andrea hectored, Jehanne stared. They wrote to Pope Clement the Sixth (revelling at Avignon), but got only the cool reply that his dear departed brother-in-Christ, King Robert, had known his own business better than any one else, and that Andrea must try to live in harmony with his young wife. This letter the Pope sent by Messer Francesco Petrarch of Vacluse, with orders to bring him full report of things ere he advised further.

Petrarch's report is of weight to our tale, so I quote him :—

“ I arrived at Naples the 11th of October. Heavens !

what a change has one man's death produced! Religion, Justice, and Truth are banished! I think me at Memphis, Babylon, or Mecca!

"Instead of just, pious King Robert, a little monk, fat, bare-footed, shorn-headed, half draped by a dirty robe, bent by hypocrisy, lost in debauchery, proud of both his affected poverty and the real wealth he steadily amasses—this man holds the reins of this staggering empire.

"He was a Hungarian cordelier, preceptor to Prince Andrea whom he entirely sways. He oppresses the weak, despises the great, and treats both Queens with the greatest insolence. Court and city hate him, and tremble though they all plot privily—for even to think is denounced as crime.

"To him I was forced to present your Holiness's mission and he behaved with more insolence than if he had been head of the Saracens. The Bishop of Cavaillon alone stands firm in the Church against him, but what is one lamb among so many wolves?"

More to this effect, yet Pope Clement took no action, and Petrarch consoled himself with his friend Messer Giovanni Boccaccio's company.

Andrea made such a scene at the reception of the Pope's letter that Jehanne had her chamberlain remove all his belongings from her part of Castel Nuovo to the Bibirella Tower (usually used by the crown's heir), and inform him that he must henceforth occupy it.

He, knowing what brewed underneath, gave in quietly, and with his proud boiars waited till their King, Ludwig, should interfere, and thus it went on about eighteen months, till the summer of 1345.

Meanwhile the three factions, Neapolitan, Provençal

and Hungarian, rioted, bragged, and slit each other's throats in dark corners of the city and at Court in duel and intrigue. The Provençaux were Jehanne's to a man, and all the Neapolitans save those who hoped advancement from the Hungarian quarter, but the latter disliked even their Neapolitan supporters.

Cold pride will not mix with hot pride, and thus with them.

The other two strong spirits at Court were Catherine, titular Empress of Constantinople, the widow of Prince Philippe of Taranto (Empress by right of her mother, a daughter of that famous old crusader, Duke Baldwin the Norman), a most imperial lady. She was mother to three tall sons, Robert, Louis, and Philippe; of whom anon much more.

Her rival was the Dowager Duchess of Durazzo, Agnes du Perigord, wife to King Robert's other brother Jean, also left a widow with three marriageable sons, and until Andrea had actually come to Naples to claim his bride she and Catherine had striven hard for the young Queen's hand for their sons, since child-marriages were often annulled.

Yet Andrea's coming slew both their hopes, but Duchess Agnes with a true Frenchwoman's pertinacy fixed her hopes on the second place and by her eldest son, young Duke Charles, won it, for he eloped with Jehanne's sister Princess Marie, one dark night over Castel Nuovo's garden wall, and so Duchess Agnes laughed, for if Jehanne died childless Marie was Queen.

The other two Durazzo lads (like their cousins Robert and Philippe of Taranto) hung about Court gay, fooling, dancing butterflies, but Duke Charles had the sterner Anjevine spirit, and to him his mother looked confidently.

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Thus Duchess Agnes watched, till the sultry heat of August 1345 seemed a fitting atmosphere for the brooding storm, and along with her (like a cloud of hawks waiting for a staggering charger to fall), a legion of other greedy watchers waited on the staggering realm.

CHAPTER I

"Jamais nulle foy ne peut estre
Entre concurrents d'un mesme sceptre !"
CÆSAR NOSTRADAMUS.

"HEY, noble dames ! You ask me for a merry tale and shall have it.

"You will admit that few things are more diverting to hear than of a fool in office (whether he be governor of a province or a fair lady), who is well befooled by those he himself counted as foolish——"

Messer Giovanni Boccaccio's mellow voice was drowned in a little ripple of laughter from the joyous audience grouped about him ; from the pursed lips and shrugged shoulders which greeted his last words it was evident that they were held to mean more than met the ear.

Boccaccio sat shaded from the hot blue Neapolitan sky by a clump of orange trees fragrant with ivory flowers, and all a-swing with golden fruit, and his laughing, whispering listeners, gorgeous of attire as the hovering butterflies above, lolled or sat on marble benches or gay silken cushions in the grass.

The orange grove stood on a slope terraced by a marble balcony which overlooked through a gap in the palms and olives beyond it, the Bay of Naples, where the soft wind blew silver sparkles in a deep azure surface.

Behind, across flowery spaces, rose the southernmost

towers of Castel Nuovo, showing blackly in the strong sunlight's clearness.

As the laugh died and Boccaccio would have spoken again, the long-handled, white-feathered, Eastern fan of Marie Duchess of Durazzo, descended playfully upon his dark curly head. This play held a caution, for the Princess of Naples was a firm believer in the saying that trees have ears, and at her sister's Court it might be added that every blade of grass had a tongue—and that morning volatile Marie had observed a few things which made her unusually careful. Even what promised to be a very tasty jest at the expense of her royal brother-in-law Prince Andrea of Hungary, she held too risky just then, even though the jester were her favourite Boccaccio, and his hearers a chosen few of her best friends, Provençal barons and dames, who all sided with her sister Queen Jehanne against her stern consort, friends, who, indeed, had nicknamed him "Andrea Kill-Joy." So Marie's fan hastily descended.

She tilted her fair ruby-circleted head backwards, and laughed again, sweet, ringing laughter, like distant angelus bells.

"Nay, now 'Ser Giovanni! No more stiff stories of governors or lords! We see too much of them as it is. Give us something commoner—something picked up in your roamings of the town—a real mad-humoured jesting tale, to suit our mood."

"Tell what we heard last night at the Tazza d'Oro, Giovanni," chuckled Pierre de Lascaris, Comte de Tende, from where he had stretched his tall lithe person on the broad marble balcony's edge, his shrewd brown Provençal eyes narrowing with laughter.

Boccaccio smiled at the ring of eager faces, but shook a firmly negative head.

"Not with all these youngsters present!" Whereat rang a still louder peal of laughter from the gay sparks and dashing damsels.

Foulquet du Bar, Comte de Grasse, nicknamed Foulquet le Courtois for his never-failing and excessive courtesy, a limber slip of a youth, with a trovere's facile tongue, and a hopeless passion for the mighty Count di Arcusa's daughter Erminetta, here struck into the conversation.

"Tell of a false damsel and a true knight—and find models near to hand, messire." He glanced at the object of his sighs, but that lively maiden only tossed a disdainful head.

But Boccaccio was immovable.

"King of Story-tellers am I named by you," he said. "King-like, I tell my choice; yet I hear my subject, Her Highness, and will alter its setting to please her——"

"No! no! I want a merry story," objected Marie hastily.

Boccaccio's raised brows and puzzled smile had scarce straightened themselves before Guy de Mont-leon, a youth from the Marches of Savoy, seeing a favourable chance to tell the tale which he brimmed over with eagerness to tell, took up the ball of speech.

"Until 'Ser Giovanni makes up his mind again, I can fill the gap for you! I'll wager not one of you knows the true story of the Count of Lubeck's wound which he got yesterday morning?"

"He got it from Amaury of Savoy, did he not?" queried Marie.

“Yes ; but it was in this wise,” began Guy, looking pleased as the circle drew even closer together than it had done for Boccaccio. “Heinrich von Lubeck was sitting here in the Gardens, writing laboriously and muttering as he wrote. Amaury came by, stopped, and heard, ‘The Queen’s eyes are of bluest black—no, blackest—no !’

“‘How now, Count ?’ asked Amaury, guessing at his doing.

“‘I am completing a portrait of her Majesty for my august master Karl (the Emperor-elect). What is the precise hue of the Queen’s eyes ?’

“‘Sir,’ said Amaury very shortly, ‘you are a fool. Give over writing.’

“‘Why so ?’ asked Lubeck, Teutonically slow to catch a meaning.

“‘Because no mortal scribe can hope to set down the half of our Lady’s perfections, though he wear out the quills of all the geese that cackled on the Capitol ! ’Tis presumption to try—for even when you have compared her glorious person with all known goddesses, you have yet to reckon with her unspeakably fair soul—which is impossible. Take my advice and call her briefly the sun from high heaven, whose glory dazzled you too much for more—and so speak truth !’

“‘Maybe—I will not dispute she is all you say, Count,’ said Lubeck, feeling for his sword. ‘But none the more am I a fool—and this script must go in obedience to the Emperor’s commands.’

“‘I think not—at least, not unaltered,’ said Amaury quietly.

“Then he called Enrico Caraccioli and me from the harbour, where we had been overhearing all this, and

with us, and the two Sanseverini lads whom we fetched from their tennis-game, for seconds, they fought it out there and then.

“After ten minutes’ work, Amaury looked at his badly-wounded adversary and smiled at me, as the others stanchd him with their scarves.

“‘Guy,’ he said, ‘you understand. We fought about a throw at dice.’

“‘Yes,’ gasped Lubeck. ‘It is a private quarrel—or the Count might get into trouble, seeing I am ambassador.’

“At this he fainted away; and Amaury, picking up the parchment, took out an inkhorn and endorsed it before putting it back into Lubeck’s pouch, as they bore him away. I read over his shoulder:

“‘Queen Jehanne is of person tall and slender. From her high-held head her red-gold—(scrawl)—hair hangs in two great plaits, oft twined with pearls, and heavy as silken ropes. Her hands are very fine of shape, her arms very white of hue, and them I compare with the statue of Madame Helen of Troy, that is in Your Imperial hall. Her look ofter gay than grave, is yet older than usual at nineteen; for the Southern maids are women while our German lasses are yet children. Her eyes are marvellous—(scrawl)——’

“‘Tut, Lubeck! None so bad for a beery Minnesinger!—but still folly!’ said Amaury, and wrote:

“‘Here the surpassing splendour of the Light of the World, Madame Jehanne, Queen of Naples, Jerusalem and Sicily, Princess of Capua, Duchess of Apullia, and Countess of Provence the Golden, blinded the too presumptuous scribe, and so he ceased.’

"No, I say Amaury is right: none can describe her—that is, none but one of us——"

"Hold!" cried Foulquet le Courtois, as the buzz of approval sank into silence again. "What are you doing, telling us now, when Amaury held you to silence? Answer that, Guy!"

"Silence! Pfui!" said Guy, shrugging as only a Southerner can. "I need not lose the pleasure of telling a good tale when that young idiot Enrico will let it all out after his second tall biccieri, at his next festa! Besides"—with a superb glance around—"am I not with Provençaux? Do we care who knows aught to our Lady's honour, so long as those dogs in Germany hear no garbled accounts? Amaury said nothing of silence—actually, mark you, only that they fell out at dice for the benefit of the two Sanseverini, whose tongues are longer than mine——"

"We understand perfectly," said the Duchess, casting a quick look at each in turn, and ending with Boccaccio. "The Count of Savoy and the Emperor's ambassador fell out at dice. Good! There goes my sister down the path yonder. Call her, one of you, to hear 'Ser Giovanni's story."

"I go," said Guy. He vaulted lightly over the balcony, and Pierre de Lascaris, whom he managed to bump adroitly in passing, and ran after the graceful figure in shimmering heliotrope silken robe, which loitered down the sandy path.

To three-quarters of his Southern extravagance, Amaury was right.

Queen Jehanne was one of those rare spirits of which the world sees but one or two in a century, and which, when they do walk its ways, leave as they pass a fiery trace of strife and glory.

Lubeck was not alone in his failure to describe her adequately, for countless chroniclers have tried and feebly sunk into poor catalogues of her charms and virtues, without realising the woman who owned them. The troveres who sang her praises succeed rather better, but even they are unable to rise beyond the hackneyed expressions of their craft.

Perhaps the least vague of all is old Cæsar Nostradamus, the historian, son of the famous wizard-prophet Michael, of Provence, who says of her: "She was the most noble, most illustrious Princess of her time; with her great sense and high courage she governed with such prudence and strength that she did what not even her greatest ancestors, the Kings of the House of Anjou, have done—made her dominions safe from all 'brigands, larrons voleurs et mauvais garnements,' so that even in Provence was peace. She reined in her great seigneurs with much ability, rebuking their pride and evil passions with such gentle skill, that even they, who held kings as despicable things, trembled before their Queen's eyes when she turned them upon them in her royal anger. She was magnificently dignified, yet gay and *débonnaire*, but she was constancy itself in her opinions, and never wavered when her will was once set. Her beauty was marvellous, as was her grace; and while she held things pertaining to her royal state and honour very high in approval, yet she was always accessible to all. In all sorts of learned men's society she took pleasure, and poets, astronomers, orators, philosophers, and doctors of all kinds thronged her Court, and most particularly kind was she to the sweet singers who sang her praises to the world in their mother-tongue of the fair land of Provence.

“ Though her whole life was passed in a whirl of adversity, wars, and domestic troubles, the hatred of countless enemies, the curses of the Popes, and the spite of her disloyal foes, she never lowered her high courage to the assaults of either man or Fate, but by the strong rays of her glowing spirit she dispersed the clouds of wars, and rode over the waves of the most troubled state-disputes as might have done the strongest warrior-king instead of a delicate dainty woman such as she.—‘ Bref, elle fut douée de si grandes et aimables, et tant reccomandables qualitez, vertuz et perfections qu’ on l’estimoit plus tost divine qu’humaine cest aimable Princesse.’ ”

Thus far Nostradamus, but take Amaury’s word for it, Jehanne’s royal soul and lovely body mocked all efforts at setting down on paltry paper. Of all her splendid person, however, from the showers of red-gold hair to the restless little feet, the most striking feature (at which poor luckless Lubeck had so hopelessly boggled) were her wonderful eyes ; for, though each was perfect of its kind and framed in long ebony lashes, the irises were different, one a limpid deep blue-violet, the other quite black.

This odd beauty spelled irresistible fascination ; yet at this time one had but to look into their laughing depths to see that the book of Love was yet sealed to Queen Jehanne, and that, lovely as her face was, it was the hard loveliness of a marble Venus. Venus, I say, but as yet of marble ; for though there were the Love-Goddess’s passionate possibilities she had now rather the loftier coldness of apart Athene, and both pride and contempt showed in the quick quivers of the small aquiline nose’s fine nostrils, and in the firm set of the chin. Perhaps the scarlet lips laughed

too scornfully, and the full white throat lifted that chin upwards too often ; yet she had only to turn those marvellous eyes with a certain slow, half-sleepy, under-lashes smile upon her victim—and were he holy as St. Antony, he was her slave forthwith.

“ She is ice, our Jehanne,” said Boccaccio to himself. “ Ice ; but there are fires like Vesuvius below her alpine surface.”

In her sister Marie, the young Duchess of Durazzo, one saw a weaker yet warmer copy of Jehanne ; for they were much alike in build and colouring, but whatever beauty or quality in Jehanne was pronounced, in Marie was moderated, and, above all, she lacked the wonderful eyes, for hers were blue as forget-me-nots, and could not flash their command or disdain. Marie’s marriage had somehow parted her from her sister ; love had subdued her high spirits, abated no little her volatile gaiety ; and Jehanne viewed with contempt the change. Loving care for Marie’s little daughter, that was very well ; but to obedient wifely worship a mere Duke, even though he was an Anjevine, was that meet for the Princess, and heiress of Naples ? The adoration of mere man was a mystery to Queen Jehanne, and besides which disturbing doubts of Marie’s husband floated in her mind. Marie was her heiress, and Charles, though their cousin, was but Duke of a shaky Duchy. In his nature Jehanne spied both cruelty and want of scruples, but at present he and Marie were happy turtle-doves. Later events proved Jehanne’s doubts right.

“ Altesse ! ” cried Guy de Montleon, catching up Jehanne, as she went, “ Messer Giovanni is telling a story, and her Grace thought you would fain hear it.”

As a Provençal, Guy addressed her as Altesse, his liege Countess—a distinction they prized much, as marking a nearer relationship to their Sovereign than the Neapolitan “Majesty.”

She turned and smiled at him, shaking off her care-worn air.

“Gladly, for my thoughts are sombre, and ’twill banish them,” she replied. Her voice, always sweet, was silken soft in the rich vowels of the *Langue d’Oc*, and Guy smiled back, for very pleasure in the sound.

She tossed him one of two long-stemmed roses she held, as they went towards Boccaccio’s terrace together, and set the other in the knot of the magnificent rope of pearls twisted round her bare throat, and knotted on her breast, smiling again.

“For your run to fetch me!” as deftly he caught and pinned it in his cap.

“Here we come, ’Ser Nino! Lend me your bench, and sit thus at my feet.—Pierre! that cushion for him, pray!” she cried gaily, as Giovanni rose.

Pierre de Lascaris had been one of her childish playmates when, with her grandmother, Queen Sancia, she had spent some years in Provence—years which had bred her great love for that land and all its things, which love stayed with her all her life and was (as some think) her ruin.

“He is going to tell us a tale of the city,” said Marie.

“Yea, and so hush all you merry brigade, and hear the story of a fool!” said Boccaccio; and then his beautiful voice told inimitably the droll tale of the Enchanted Orange Tree, which caused the old merchant to see such marvellous visions of his young dame and his merry ’prentice, Lorenzo—a story which

had for the hearers a double interest as its characters were recognised by some of the gallants who dealt with the deluded old man for their hose and fineries in the Vico Sardinia.

As a little buzz of laughter sealed the tale, Guy de Montleon stretched himself on the grass and held up a commanding finger, then sat up, and crossed one red-hosed leg over the other.

"I am not sure this old man Nicholas was such a fool to be taken by such a lure as that!" he said slowly. "For I guess what put the idea of saying the tree was magical, into Lorenzo's pate. It is possible to see things move thus!"

"How?" asked Duchess Marie.

"It needs no magic either!" pursued Guy, waving a silencing hand on the threatening sceptical jeers. "Behold that open-mouthed, marble lion on the terrace end! Well, as I lay here, meditating after matins—stop laughing!—I oft *do* meditate!—I vow that as I watched it steadily, its jaws actually seemed to snap together! I got up, and felt it, but they were wide apart. I deemed it magic, so set my cap with a medal of the Holy Mary of Arles on the beast's head.

"Still it happened, so I take it for a cheating of the light or my eyes or somewhat. Perhaps Lorenzo had seen a like thing, and acted on't."

The whole company began to watch the said lion, then to laugh and exclaim, as each saw differently, some nothing, others that it yawned and snapped. Jehanne, glancing at the grove whence she had come, saw in its shadows a brown frock lurk. Quick disgust rose—the Prince's monk spied upon her then! By Peter! He should see something!

She looked round and choose as her tool Amaury of Savoy, Lubeck's fiery victor, whom the Court named her most favoured Provençal; he had strolled up just in time to hear Guy's last statement, and now leaned idly on the balcony.

The Red Count, men dubbed him, partly from the way he ruled in Savoy, partly from the crimson clothes he nearly always affected, this habit dating from when so armed and housed, in the lists at Capua, he had held Jehanne's glove against all comers during three days of tourney, and sung her a *sirvente* which eclipsed all the professional troveres afterwards.

He was thirty only, but thirty in the Naples of that day was an old fifty anywhere else in experience. Ever since when nine years ago, he had first seen ten-year-old Jehanne at Avignon, the world had held for him no other thought. Five years later when his father died, he did what seemed sheer madness in that day, that is, put his young brother Umberto as Senechal to hold his County of Savoy, and set off for Naples where (save for brief trips home) he had been ever since.

Jehanne liked him, because their minds had much in common; both had so much self-reliance, such hatred of interference, such independence, and swift action; and Amaury was very skilful at showing her sympathy in the manful silent way, which her fretting spirit appreciated. She guessed at a deeper feeling, but pushed the thought away, unwilling to disturb her own peace, and favoured him steadily as her knight. Her knight, of mere tourneys, and song singing, be it understood—a rank which meant nothing more to outward view, as she had a score of

others all alike proclaiming her Queen of Earth in every joust a-field.

Despite her favours, however, Amaury had few foes among the Provençaux; he was too cheerful with men in peace, and too good a comrade in war, to make serious rivals, and in the lesser Court intrigues he never dabbled.

It needed a keener eye than any of those gay triflers possessed to spy out the real Amaury—the condottiere under the courtier—for he was as deep in cunning as the sea at the foot of his native Alpes Maritimes, and he could bide his time as their avalanches hang patient till the first boulder is shaken loose.

The Hungarians hated him, however, for he was very friendly with Bertrand des Baux, the Grand Justicer, and his relations (of whom more afterwards).

“That lion is but a dead subject for trial!” cried the Queen.

“Let us have a real test like the story. I see Erminetta there, look startled—perhaps she is too shy to try with some one I could name! So my grave sober self shall do’t! Count Amaury—hither! Sit by me on the bench—Now look every one—like Nicholas!”

Amaury’s expressive grey-brown eyes showed for an instant a tell-tale light, which he hid by quickly changing seats, but his breath came shorter as her scented veil blew against his cheek.

Jehanne turned to him, and in her look he read that she would play out the jest—he had not dared to hope she really would.

The others watched as though they glamoured them. Gradually their heads drew together—for a desper-

ate flash Amaury battled with the desire to draw her sharply to him, and lay not one, but many kisses on both lips, and the matchless throat which showed tempting as Eve's apple above the low, broïdered collar of her gown. Then by a supreme effort he mastered it, and as cool as she, touched lightly the cheek which felt like a rose leaf's inner side.

Amid the clapping and cries that followed a long shadow fell on the terrace—that of a man, very tall, very stiff, very slow at raising the fur-bound kalpag from his head.

“The Prince wills her Majesty to attend him within the Castel,” he said in Italian, with a strong foreign accent.

Queen Jehanne deliberately folded her arms.

“Go, tell the Duke of Calabria that the Queen of Naples is not to be fetched within, by him for no given reason. If he wishes speech with Us let him come hither. We are not at his call,” she said solemnly as in the Council Chamber. Boccaccio thought her sterner than the affair warranted, but sympathised silently.

The Hungarian went, but once from hearing, muttered wrathfully.

He was a proud boiar, brother to Ladislaus Apor, the great Voivode of Transylvania, and held neither of his sovereigns in high respect ; still it galled him to see Hungary's power flouted by a mere Neapolitan girl.

“By King Arpad's soul !” he swore under breath. “If we were but let loose a day, we would sweep them into their sea, as he swept the Brenta's banks on the day when he sent King Berengar to the Pit !”

Presently Prince Andrea came out, all in an angry

twitter, his flabby white face whiter than usual between the two wings of dull brown hair which framed it. He marched up to his wife now alone on her bench, and curling the end of one of her long plaits daintily round her finger.

"A word with you, Maddonna," he said in a high, shaking voice.

"Ten if you will," said she, calm as a lake during noon-hush.

Andrea spluttered a Hungarian oath.

She was half minded to stay and face out whatever grievance he had so patiently in mind, but with the tail of her eye saw Amaury's hand gripping his dagger hilt till the veins rose. Caution fought with reckless contempt, and won.

She made her husband a quietly commanding sign.

"Let us speak apart," she said, and they went off together, he with short, nervous pace, she gliding as a sleigh over ice.

Amaury raised his brows to the circle, shrugged his shoulders, and drawing Guy de Montleon's arm through his, wandered away among the orange trees.

The Queen and Prince walked meanwhile in the shady grove.

"How well that lemon tree grows; I had it put there myself, years ago," she said tranquilly, as if it were her uppermost idea. "I wonder if the lemons will be good?"

Then Andrea's wrath exploded.

"Lemons! Thunderbolts! What a-devil do you mean by degrading you as anon? I insist on answer, —I—"

Jehanne looked at him as at an angry child, her serenity unstirred.

“A pity you are so excitable!” she said. “You forget that a Queen may amuse herself unquestioned—sometimes. Also if she be spied upon, it may not be a pleasant sight for the spiers.”

“Great Ladislaus! You let your minion kiss your cheek—is that amusement? O dignity of queens! How dared you?”

“Well, Prince”—a shade more acidly—“if you please to kiss all my prettiest damsels in game thus, I shall say no word, be sure. You had best not complain.”

Though there was absolutely no deeper meaning concealed in her last words, Andrea started slightly. She did not mark it then, but afterwards it came to her mind. But he was of those who ride their galled steeds till they throw them, and went on now:

“If you think I shall allow such things to be——”

“I do not see how you can prevent them,” said Jehanne, with the smile of security.

“When I am King of Naples in name as well as fact——” he spurted, but she checked him with a waved hand.

“Too far off to plan for, as yet! Now, Prince, I am very weary of the subject; I tell you finally I wish no more of it. You had best accept things as they are. I am Queen of Naples by heritage, and you are my Consort. If I refuse you what title you are not capable of holding, it is for my nation’s good, and thus not my personal fault. Take my rede, moreover, and remain contented, Duke of Calabria. So are you

free and careless. . . . Believe me, the crown is but weary wear sometimes, but as 'tis my duty, so must I bear the weight."

This increased Andrea's rage ; his mouth worked, he stopped short and faced her on trembling feet.

Suddenly there swept up to them, perhaps, the only person who could have stilled the breaking storm, the saintly Bishop of Cavaillon, Philippe de Cabassolle, Jehanne's favourite prelate, indeed, the only one she tolerated as a friend. His views were very broad, and his tact and wit were those of an experienced man of the world, though his saintly life was in sharp contrast to some of the other Princes of Holy Church in Naples. He was only in his fortieth year, and his stately stride and upright figure gave his sweeping robes more the air of a king's mantle than a bishop's vestments, and the light of his kind brown eyes under his straight-cut fringe of dark hair was very pleasant. He read the storm signals of Andrea's flushed face and Jehanne's curled lip, and promptly tried to avert them.

"Holy Mary's blessing, daughter ! Here is a packet from Pisa, which will please you, or I am wrong. It is from our sweet singer Arnaud de Coutignac, and contains a new *sirvente* to your praise, and a rough sketch for your canopy's decorations with ferns and roses, at your coming Court d'Amour at Capua. He sends it in advance of his own arrival, and begs me to read you the *sirvente* (after three pages loyal laudations of his Queen) myself."

"Why so ?" asked she, her wrath fled before eager pleasure.

"He says his poor script is unworthy your divine

eyes, but the *sirvente's* sound alone may pass muster. The sketch is by one Paolo—t'other name ill-writ—a pupil of Messer Giotto's. Shall I read the *sirvente* ? ”

There is nothing like a third party's smooth eloquence to quench an angry man's splutters, and the good Bishop's chatter gave an anticlimax to Andrea's wrath.

“Curse your singing-jays ! ” he growled, and strode off.

“Arnaud is a fantast of the first order,” said Jehanne. “Never heed his ceremonies, dear Father ; give me the parchment.”

It was a fair tribute of the renowned trovere's pen to his Queen, one of many, for Arnaud of the Lerins of Provence sang to no other lady, and all his songs exalt her to the sun ; all his life he clave to her in rain and shine. This one, however, was of much importance, as it gave her first that name by which she lives in many a Provençal ballad and story, as “Jehanne aux Lèvres d'Or, ” or “Labre d'Oro ” in Provençal, Langue d'Oc. The first verse I venture to English thus :

“Jehanne of the Golden Lips, fair fountains whose glittering rush of words throws high into the happy air pearls and diamonds of most glorious kind ; for the spring which gave them birth is the Thought of She whose heart is clear and hard as the diamond and whose soul is whiter than the pearl.

“Could I but catch one of those gems and claim it mine, because it was a kind thought for me, then would I think myself more blessed than a soul freed from Purgatory.

“A genie once asked me what I held the most glorious, blest deed in the world, and I answered : “To take one of the word-jewels of the Golden Lips and replace it in its source by a long and marvellous kiss ; but this task is too high for man, and will never be done unless Apollo quits Olympus, for only he is worthy of this deed.’

“Arnaud's fancy improves with travel,” said she,

well pleased. "I shall let him sing this at the Court d'Amour."

"My child," said Cavaillon slowly, "is not your husband wroth about this Court? I heard him say as much to one of his barons yesterday."

"Most like!" said Jehanne carelessly. "He is wroth about everything I have a hand in. Ha! what is that below on the lawn? A scuffle, I declare! Will they never cease brawling!" Yet she welcomed the interruption, for she was always shy of speaking of Andrea to the Bishop, and in her present reckless mood particularly so; his peaceful words reproached her, made her angry with herself, when she was only angry with Andrea.

On the lawn below the terrace was a pretty deep fountain-basin, where swam goldfishes, and whence now stuck up and wagged furiously two strange objects—objects which that very gentle youth Foulquet le Courtois was holding, and, despite their struggles, pushing deeper into the water.

Around him half-a-dozen men and girls stood laughing and advising:

"Deeper Foulquet—dip the rat in harder!" Jehanne heard Pierre de Lascaris call. She now saw the two objects were feet—spurred feet—and she called promptly:

"Hither Foulquet!" Foulquet instantly dropped the kicking, splashing ankles and crossed the grass, not a hair of his straight-cut, fair fringe awry, not a particle ruffled of temper, drying daintily his hands on a lawn handkerchief as he came.

"What did you yonder, Count?" said Jehanne.

"Queen of Queens, a most unworthy act in your service—a nothing—not worth the telling."

“ I saw something—speak ! ”

“ Most Perfect, it was but a toad of a Hungarian, who muttered to himself a word to which I held he had no right, so as I thought a toad’s home was water—I took him by the waist and hove him into the pond. And as he was so thick of heresies I held him there awhile, to be well soaked.”

Foulquet’s quaint conceits always amused her, and she laughed now.

The hapless baron had splashed out of the pond, and now came dripping towards them, but Foulquet faced about.

“ Hence ! frog ! ” he cried, “ or I proclaim why I put you there ! ”

The Hungarian, who was one of the mighty house of Czak of Trencsen, shook his fist at him.

“ Wait till I am dry ! ” he growled.

“ I will put you both where you will be drier still ! ” cried Jehanne sharply. “ There is quite enough fighting to be done now-a-days, my lords, without making any more ! Get within, and dry you, boiar, and there it must end ! Count Foulquet, you walk with me here awhile ! ”

Her word being law, thus it happened, but as they went, she asked Foulquet :

“ What said he that you took amiss ? I am curious—to-day is dull.”

“ I do not wish to say—but since my Countess insists—he said that the Prince was showing his authority at last. I thought a ducking would hurt his pride worse than my sword his body—so——”

And any one seeing the smile she flashed upon him then would have asked no further why her Provençaux laid down their lives for her so blithely !

“But he will kill you now,” she said.

“No, he will not, Altesse,” said Foulquet confidently. “But when I have your leave to prevent him so doing—why, then he will soon dwell where he will think the coolness of that fountain a most desirable thing indeed !”

CHAPTER II

BESIDE the square paved, white-dusted Roman road ten miles north-west of Taranto, stood the inn *Le Due Falconi*; a lonely little white house in a maze of vineyards, a *contadino's* hut, and a few desolate columns of a ruined Greek temple to *Ceres*, opposite its door, for all neighbours.

Blue mountains fenced the sky-rim to northwards; southwards through the plain, the road twisted through more vine trellises, to where distantly rose the towers of royal Taranto, beyond there showed a glitter of blue sea.

On the inn's north side, screened from the sun-glare by a dusty vine, a man sat drinking the rather sour wine of the plains; a man wearing the fantastic dress of a wandering *jongleur*, whom any one adept in such matters would have guessed of France rather than Italy.

A *jongleur*—yet at the first glance men looked again—at the second felt an unreasoning impulse to be cap in hand, and if—(rarely this)—he troubled to return a searching look, they were so.

Yet there was no suggestion of bully or swaggerer about him, no hint of armed authority in his quiet manner—only that indescribable something which bids obedience of all—and gets it. Louis, Prince of Taranto, second son of that imperial Lady, Empress

Catherine, had amongst other nicknames, that of "His Serenity," and with reason. No man in peace or war had ever seen him anything but the calm, unruffled personage who now sat under the vine, but he was also called "Louis the Lance,"—Luigi Lancia—quick, supple, and deadly of point.

The latter name fitted his person, for he was tall—very tall—and slender like the lance's shaft, but beneath the smooth skin of his arms the powerful muscles rippled like steel bands under satin, and his grip was a thing to remember. His hair and moustache were of that rare shade between red and golden, his face very white, the sun seeming powerless to tan it even though he was always in its light, his eyes of the blue-green tint often seen with such colouring.

"A Court man—a woman's man," one might say at first sight, but one was never more mistaken. Louis of Taranto might play courtier to out-act the best liar that ever bowed to a throne, but such things did not touch the man himself—he had a sceptic and philosopher's disdain for such follies, and held his own exalted rank a necessary evil only.

In all his affairs he walked alone, for he like Count Amaury held all men liars, and reasonably, considering those among whom he moved; having also the self-sufficient, self-reliant certitude of the feline tribe, along with their gift of silent movements and lightning quickness in action.

And as for his being a woman's man, he was (still like the lance) no weapon for their hands. Fate, with her sarcastic way of giving us just what we do not desire, gave to him to please women without effort, and in his early youth the unwelcome favours of half his mother's fair suite made him hail with relief her

proposal that he should go to her lands in Achaia, where trouble brewed against both Epiros and the Turks. With her and his brother Robert, and her factotum (and their tutor), Messer Niccolo Accaiuolo, the famous Florentine banker, he went, and for awhile they dwelt in gorgeous half-barbaric Greek splendour, but soon Robert hankered for the easy luxury of gay Castel Nuovo, and the Empress grew uneasy about Duchess Agnes' influence with Jehanne in their absence. Presently they fluttered Naples-wards, and there stayed (brief needful visits to Taranto excepted), leaving Louis and Niccolo to quell the riotous land.

Niccolo, though only thirty-five, had the world-craft of sixty, and ever since the day when he had as a mere boy come to Taranto to win the trust of Catherine's husband, he had made steady progress, so that he was now (since his master's death) her chief counsellor and adviser, in financial affairs. Louis was his favourite of the lads, and he too turned gladly from his brother's follies and fripperies to the grave, bold Florentine's company, and together they held the Morea like paladins of old, baffled Epiros, drove out the Turks, cruised among the Isles of Greece, went to Constantinople disguised as knights errant, to follow a state intrigue there, and in the years they spent thus, Louis bore a man's part in countless adventures.

Niccolo taught him as he would have done his own son, thus giving him all the Florentine craft, to add to his Anjevine daring, and the subtilty learned by dealing with the Greeks.

Yet even though Niccolo had himself reared, and sharpened the claws of this young leopard, at times he almost feared him, for his iron calm in danger, his

strange, silent, almost uncanny powers of endurance, and his curious indifference to the ordinary youthful delights of wine and women.

For the latter he had no eyes, and would give the fairest as casual a glance as to any plain old peasant. No derisive bantering of Niccolo or his brother could shake his indifference to the fairest of Taranto's Court, when after his Eastern adventures he returned there. To his content a threatened tragedy cut short such gentle annoyances.

Lovely Ottolina di Sanseverino threw herself into the blue Bay of Taranto leaving a passionate letter on her table, declaring her unreturned love for Prince Louis was the cause of it. Alack! She was spied and rescued despite herself by a young knight, shrieking her idol's name. He, by some odd whim of destiny's, chanced to be walking on the shore, and arrived just in time to assist the dripping pair to land, and when she threw herself fainting at his feet, he merely said with gentlest courtesy to her rescuer, that had he been able by the gift of even half his principedom to have prevented her rash act, he would have done so, but his affection was the one gift he could not give to any woman.

Fortunately for Ottolina's pride, the young knight was gallant enough to save the situation by falling in love with her himself, and soon after offering her his hand, but when the story leaked out the Prince had peace, and went his serene way, mixing little with the Court, and devoting himself to the state's interests. It was easier for him to keep apart, because so many Tarentine nobles were gone with the Empress to shine in Naples' gayer, wider sphere. Thither he refused to go, despite all his mother and brothers' invitations ;

he had been there once as a child, when Jehanne was in Provence, and he knew that the whirlpool of frivolity which would seize him there meant sheer waste of time.

He had a certain scorn for his mother's pandering to the crown, and a sound contempt for Robert and Philippe's luxurious ways, and once he replied angrily to their importunities :

"Leave me alone ! I know my own desires best. I will not sap my strength by such late hours and feast as would wear out a Turkish wrestler ! What would become of your revenues which pay you, those pretty silks and gems, if I fluttered there too ? Be content, lest I strike for my pay like the Catalan Grand Company's men !" His lips turned their corners in a whimsical smile, and the two princes took the hint, for truly their minds had no care for Taranto so long as he slept in its palace.

So he stayed, ruling the sea-girt city, and during his leisure studying his favourite art in a high tower overlooking the classic waters where once Ulysses passed, equally unheeding of the worldly sirens.

As a boy Louis had had that good gift a perfect, high, soaring voice, which broke just before he left for the East, to Messer Niccolo's despair, for as he vowed, it was the nearest thing to the music of the seraphini which had ever broken silence, in the Principality. But to the Florentine's joy when it formed again, it was as perfect as ever, a wonderful golden tenor, of that rare, sweet timbre which not one in a thousand voices has to perfection, a voice whose power and fascination can only be compared to the spell-casting chaunts of Orpheus. If he sang in camp, the crowd of turbulent listeners were silent till the last

note died—if he sang in any Duomo, the people about him simply hushed their own voices to hear him, so he would laugh and be mute perforce.

Yet at first he was Niccolo's despair, for he held his gift lightly, as a mere accessory to the noble craft of poetry, for had Fate not made him Prince he had surely been trovere.

However, Niccolo's lectures awakened him.

"Domeniddio!" he cried one day, when Louis had sung a Noel, till there was not a dry-eyed person of the impressionable crowd, within hearing. "Cannot you hear how divine you are? O, Luigi! Stupid Luigi! Why will you not take care of your voice? You would be Prince of all Trovere if you would but sing your own verse! You have a golden flute in your throat—and you sleep in the marsh mists—O! There! You are a fool, Luigi!"

"Flatterer!" laughed Louis. "Yet maybe—Bene! I will find time and study! Only one thing," he added sharply, "I will not sing to the gaping fools at Court. Fortunately we are yet in Salonika here, and none but the Greeks and our men here know my voice has come back. I must cease singing about, as I have done."

Thus very few in Taranto knew the identity of the marvellous trovere who sang on the tower-top at early hours, and these few respecting his wish were discreetly deaf and dumb about it.

Gradually he grew to love his art, and even Niccolo was appeased at the pains he took. X

Yet this outwardly cold and unfathomable Prince had a sunny side for one other person besides Niccolo, and that was his young sister, the wilful lovely Princess Marguerite. She like him had a strong will and

hatred of ceremonies, but in other respects she was his entire opposite, for she was as gay as a lark, and her chatter ran like a brook all day long. Though she was nineteen, and the prettiest thing of Taranto, Empress Catherine left her there; some said the imperial mother feared she might favour some ineligible suitor at the Neapolitan Court, others that so tall a daughter marked her own age too closely.

So Marguerite passed her time at home, in trying to meddle in Louis's state business, much as a kitten tugs at the links in a mail-coat, and in dodging the too conscientious attentions of a very strict old bull-dog of a duenna.

A while of peace had set Louis's desires actionwards again, and now he was embarked on a fantastic quest; thus he came to be seated in a jongleur's array under the vines upon the Naples road.

No one, he believed, save his able Aragonese friend, Don Diego della Ratta (whom he had left in charge at Taranto) knew his plans. Messer Niccolo was safely in Naples arranging some banking for the Empress, who with her sons was equally safe in their Palazzo there. Even Marguerite knew not of his venture, thought Prince Louis, as he smiled at the distant towers of his city in content.

Suddenly a mule's feet pattered on the road, a girl's voice spoke to the host, and a few moments later its owner came out into the vine's shelter. She was a gaily-clad, high-voiced, quick-footed piece of goods, with a *vielle* slung over her shoulder by a red ribbon, and a freakish red hood perched on her loose, hanging black curls—evidently one of those wandering jongleureses, a song-singer, and masque-dancer, who made gay the halls of every castle in France and Italy.

Louis glanced for the male minstrel, who he thought must accompany her, saw no one, looked away, and dismissed her from his mind—which had more on it than little wandering singing maids.

Not so she. She banged upon the table, demanded a drink of the host, in broken Italian with a French accent, and then fell to coughing and scraping her foot about.

Louis, indifference itself, tilted his chair, yawned, rose, stretched himself to his great height's uttermost and would have re-entered the inn, but suddenly she spoke.

"Greeting, brother o' the road!" she said easily, in French with the strong southern accent of the Langue-d'Oc's land. "Is what they have brought you any better stuff than this mule-drench here?"

He pushed his unemptied jug towards her "Try it—I have done."

"Domna nostra! 'Tis much worse than mine!" she cried, with a little grimace. "Ah! what would I not give for a taste of good Gascon—if I had another denier on me!" Then, as he said nothing immediately, "Santa Cecilia! I had not taken a Frenchman to be so slow at a hint! By that gallant blue tunic and nearly new mantle, times seemed better with you than that!"

Her very impudence began to amuse him. He called the host and asked for his best, and sat there while she drank it. Then, as she nursed her vielle, he said:

"Well, damoiselle, good wine should tune your voice. Let me have a song as payment. 'Tis all I ask—no refusal!"

But the girl bridled at this inoffensive demand, sniffed, and shrugged her slight shoulder scornfully.

"What is amiss, sweet mavis?" asked Louis of her petulance.

"You are a strangely handsome lad to be so green!" she said; but, turning her head aside, "Do they make many like you in your land? Mestrikes you are new to the road!"

"Why so, most mystic-humoured one?"

"Am I so ugly that for half-an-hour your eyes seem in your pouch, sir jongleur? Never in all Nita de Cahor's travels has she met your like!"

She languished such a look at him that he could have laughed in her face at her effrontery—he smiled even so.

"Mestrikes also that Ma Damoiselle Nita de Cahors is the vainest lady I have met in all my travels," he said pleasantly. "I admit I wholly lack learning in winding roads and too-kind ladies."

His manner was bantering and indifferent enough to have silenced a bolder than she, but she snapped her brown fingers in the air.

"Ah bah! for your fine ladies! If you know no better, 'tis time some one taught you! Payment in a song, by Venus! You may have your first lesson now!"

Ere he could rise she sat upon his knee, her arms round his neck!

Too astonished for an instant to push her off, he sat quiet; then as her head found his shoulder, a sweet familiar scent rose from her curls. No two people in Taranto had that perfume; its make was a secret.

Suspicion blazed—he turned her face upwards—only to receive a kiss on the lips !

“ Ha, Marie ! Marguerite, thou naughty little baggage ! ”

She sprang from him, and skipped and laughed till the very goblets danced.

“ Eh, Louis ! Louis ! What a fool a wise man can be ! ’Tis the best jest of my life ! Oh, I would give a thousand lys d’or to have our Philippe here, too ! What betrayed me ? My speech ? What ? ” She spoke purest French, her broken accent and loud tone both gone.

Louis checked his laughter to catch her, stare, and make sure. But he was right : the tawdry dress, black wig, and browned skin hid his venturesome sister.

“ Use not that odour of lilies and musk rose when next you run a-masking. Comfort you—you are perfectly disguised else. But how a-Mary’s name could you follow me ? And why trouble to fool me, who, as you see, am not worth the fooling ? ”

“ Firstly, dear Louis,” said she, perching on the table and checking off her reasons on her slender fingers—“ firstly, you were very foolish to talk secrets in my garden’s rose arbour, where anything might be about. I was. Three weeks ago you were there with Don Diego, and said to him : ‘ Get me the jongleur’s gear from your tailor—then I will start for Naples. The morning I depart, you will say that I rode out alone to surprise Godmother Duchessa Madallena di Otranto by a visit—for some days. Put this letter in your pouch—’tis to say I shall stay on there, hunting for another fortnight—and you will “ receive ” it in ten days’ time.’ So is your month’s absence explained in Taranto, my Louis ! ”

“Ha, little spy! You did not overhear all?”

Marguerite laughed, and went on teasingly:

“Did I not? Listen. You said: ‘An odd venture this, Diego, but the only way to see my royal cousin in her true colours. As a princely cousin I should see but her guarded stately side—I would see her as a woman—the siren woman of report. A doubly strange whim for me, who never cast eyes twice on any fair one; but of late my curiosity is eager to see her—our famous Queen, who takes and breaks men’s souls like spinning thread by her indifferent cold-splendour. My mother has lauded her to me a hundred times, and shown me portraits—but what then? I would see for myself our Anjevine Circe. And I will have a rare jest if I am discovered in approaching her.’

“But Don Diego laughed and replied: ‘Beware, lest you get a frost-bite there, my Louis! Ice burns if held too long, though I do think you are yourself the most inhumanly frozen man who walks this sun-kissed earth.’

“But you, too, laughed. ‘Nay, fear not for me, Diego. My High Song Goddess will never have mortal rival. My ideal woman lives not, but I am curious to see my queenly cousin’s sorceries close.’

“Then I crept away lest you heard me.

“Secondly: Home is too stupid to endure, with our mother and brothers in Naples; I have no pleasure whatever save your company——”

“Fie—honey-pot!” said he; but she went on:

“Only tristesse, stiff clothes, and stiffer ceremonies! I am the Princess regnant—I am the Princess bored! So I will have holiday, too! Dio mio! How delightful ’twas as I rode along! No stupid obeisances,

shouts, or guards—no thrice abominable Donna Agneta for ever at my elbow! Tra la la! The air is full of joy out here!”

“But, Rita mine, how knew you when I departed? These clothes of yours? How left you the Palazzo unseen?”

“Most easily. Fanchette the lace-tender’s daughter comes every day with my fal-lals—a knowing wench. For five lys d’or she got me wig and dress and taught me to act the singing-lass. She also knew Don Diego’s tailor, and when the suit was ready watched your rooms as a cat the mouse-hole. Thus, this morn, all my notes ready written, I got up and rode away. I could not resist singing to a dozen archers in the Piazza—who gave me several scudi—nor to leave Donna Agneta a billet thus: ‘For some days your eyes will have rest from spying after me; it will preserve them from squinting!!’ I sent Paolo my page home to his mother, so she will think him at Godmother’s with me and you. I am safe, be sure!”

“Excellently planned,” said Louis, when her chatter ceased. “But now you had best turn back, your jest played——”

Blank amazement sat on Marguerite’s brow.

“Art stricken stupid, Louis? Maddonnina mia! I am coming with you! My pack is on the mule. I have gold——”

“Certes, no!” said he curtly. “An impossible journey for you!”

Her quick temper blazed.

“I will write straight to Philippe and the Queen and spoil your plan. And I will run off alone at the first chance, and then Mother Mary alone knows what might hap to me! With you I am safe. Ah, dearest

Louis ! why so harsh with your Marguerite ? And—you cannot refuse me, because unless you carry me back to Taranto I will not go—that also would ruin your scheme ! ”

Louis halted. He knew she would do so, for she also had the Valois obstinacy of their mother ; besides which his wilful sister’s small hand was the only one which could bend the stiff Lance from his will.

He stroked his long golden moustache slowly, and smiled at her eager face laid caressingly on his shoulder.

“ A very hot, dusty journey—strange, dirty inns o’ nights ! You are Court-reared, remember.”

“ Oh, if that be all ”—with a little grimace—“ I fear neither mice nor fleas ! Neither like me. I come ! Let us be off ! ”

“ First promise me not to wink your naughty eyes at any other jongleurs—who might be more experienced in such troveresque courtesies than I ! My sword is not Taranto’s guards——”

“ Eh, my own Louis ! Yes ! I promise aught ! Come, let us start ! ” And with an impetuous embrace she dashed for the inn door.

CHAPTER III

“ Les Dieux ont les pieds de laine
Mais ils ont les mains de Fer.”

NOSTRADAMUS.

It was King Charles I. of Anjou, that stern ancestor of King Robert the Wise, who built the fortress of Castel Nuovo, on the shores of Naples Bay, to replace as his residence the smaller Castel del Ovo, which still juts into the sea on its rocky spur.

His primary idea for Castel Nuovo was that of impregnable strength, and it ranked among the best Anjevine forts. Standing a little back from the shore on a hillock, it had a wide, clear space between the waves and its two southernmost towers. Five towers it still has, heavy, dark, and round-crested, forming its outer bounds; two looking south-eastwards, the others north-west. East and west of the Castel King Charles left space for great herb gardens to serve his garrison, within the bounds of his sea-filled moat. Landwards, facing the chief gate, la Porta Reale, was another open square or *larga* in Neapolitan speech.

But serious, martial King Charles would have turned in his tomb had he seen the frivolous, flower-filled spaces those gardens became in his grandson's reign. Hear Boccaccio on their glories:

“ Filled were they with exquisite green things—fair grass and flowers exhaled sweetest scents, and

round the parterres superb thick-foliaged trees were joy to see."

In their shade were many fantastically shaped casini, some filled with rare birds, others for siestas at high noon; and all over the gardens roamed a herd of graceful gazelles with gold collars, gifts from the Sultan of Tunis to King Robert.

In the eastern garden were deep thickets, where rolled in long grass a pair of slim panthers, who seemed free as in the jungle till one spied their bright steel collars and chains among the undergrowth.

Farther off, chained also, were some young lions, and eastwards in artificial caves skipped dainty little fawns, and in a sand bank rare white hares, far from their northern home. Marble statues and curious birds abounded, as did strange fish in shady fountain-basins, and golden pheasants and peacocks strutted by the hedges, often trimmed to form surprise vistas of the Bay, Capri and Vesuvius.

One very lovely fountain was formed by a weary Diana, who leaned over a golden plated faun's head, holding a cup to the lips, from which dashed a crystal stream.

There were gilded, velvet-decked swings in the trees, smooth lawns for the new game of tennis-ball, and long alleys where the gay company might shoot at silken targets. In short, these pleasaunces were entirely meet for the most splendid Court of Italy; and the brilliance of Naples then was only rivalled by that of the French Court at its gayest periods. In Castel Nuovo's great halls and gilded alcoves went on intrigues of love, death, and ambition, besides which those of later, more scrupulous ages seem pale and tame. Under the gold-broidered draperies lurked

the steel poignard ; in the fair woman's kiss was ambition's poison.

But in King Robert's reign factional feuds among the nobles diminished ; the King had the priceless gift of tact, and besides he mixed with the rougher warrior element, a gracious leaven of art and literature, such as no other monarch of his time could draw to his court.

Such names as Petrarch, Giotto, Boccaccio, Barilli, the Colonna tell their own tale of brilliance ; and minor artists, trovere, and singers of all sorts swarmed among the dukes, duchesses, and ambassadors.

At the long marble tables in the great library overlooking the Bay, King Robert had stilled many a quarrel by his adroit interposition of learned discussions on art and poetry, diverted many a wreck of peace on the rocks of anger by his soothing flatteries and tact.

In the Chapel of St. Barbara, and in the secret Chapel of St. Martino, beneath it, he set Giotto to fresco the walls ; and though now, unfortunately, there remains no trace of his work, one may picture them in their glory of saints and people them with the brilliant congregations who heard the Bishop of Cavaillon's famous sermons, and the renowned singing boys, whose voices made Vespers a joy and High Mass a triumph.

South of the Castel ran to the western Torre del Oro, or treasury, a high grassy bank, terraced by a marble balcony guarded by stately white statues, who watched the gorgeous gowns of the ladies trail like peacocks in the sun.

Across the moat hung two drawbridges, and on the Castel's east was a second gate, more rarely used than

Porta Reale, facing another stretch of gardens, beyond which lay Larga Correggie, where tourneys were held, and which was bounded by several nobles' palaces.

It was the fashionable square of Naples, though in a sense less important than Larga Carbonara, farther north, in the city's heart, where took place those real gladiatorial games which, by their unabashed old-Roman brutality, so horrified Petrarch; and where, owing to its nearness to the Mercato there were often riotous gatherings of all sorts.

On the sea-front south of Larga Correggie, beyond the western end of Castel Nuovo's gardens, with its back to the Convent of St. Pietro del Castello, was the Palazzo Durazzo, whither Princess Marie had fled with her cousin, Charles, helped over the garden wall by her maid, Margarita di Ceccano. It was a very splendid building, though for outward and inward magnificence nothing rivalled Palazzo di Taranto, which lay north of Castel Nuovo, opposite Porta Reale, across a wide open larga.

Such were Castel Nuovo's surroundings, worthy of its royal crown of towers whereof the most easterly was called Bibirella (Neapolitan corruption of Vivarium, from the falcon-caves below it); the next, south-east, Thalassi, wherein usually lived the heir to the throne. North-west to landwards were Torre del Oro (thus the corner tower), and between the remaining pair named respectively St. Michael and St. George, flanking Porta Reale, now called the Arch of Alfonso of Aragon. Yet a sixth Torre St. Vincenzo stood on the little isle dei Magari, linked to land by a breakwater, opposite what is to-day the arsenal, and formed a lighthouse and port defence.

Queen Jehanne used the King's rooms on the first floor of the Castel, but to Prince Andrea her door had been closed for more than a year before this story opens, and he occupied Bibirella.

Torre del Oro held the Crown jewels, and no less than four hundred and thirty treasure-caskets, among which were hundreds of beautiful cameos and medals, and where a black velvet covered table held the crowns, orbs, and sceptres. There were collars, splendid sapphire and ruby-set girdles, bracelets, rings, and clasps in Pactolian profusion ; for many nobles sent their most precious gems to the King's safe keeping, and the Chronicle of the Tesoro reads like some dream of Midasian hoards.

In the lower and northern part of the Castel lodged the Court, and below-stairs was a motley tribe of pretty maids-in-waiting, squires, musicians, pages, chamberlains, notable cooks, and skilful barbers ; for beauty was served with elaborate rites, and a more than Roman luxury of perfumes and baths.

The stables where hundreds of valuable horses and white mules stamped and fretted, and the mews where the best falcons of Italy screamed and flapped, were of a piece with the general splendour.

The two chamberlains of Queen and Prince had no easy ruling in their two huge households, for the extravagance was enormous. The older, wiser Lords of the Council shook prudential heads, but without avail.

King Robert had kept open house, and Queen Jehanne followed his example.

The Empress Catherine of Constantinople walked along the shady alley in Castel Nuovo gardens, where Jehanne had passed anon.

She strolled slowly up and down, her hands clasped behind her august head, her lips moving silently. It was a favourite mannerism of hers, like her way of glancing to right and left, as if she expected something to start up beside her. Her dark eyes never looked one in the face as she talked, or rather never seemed to do so, for it was when her thoughts seemed to wander most that she was most observant, and when she seemed freest that she was most guarded. She knew just how to pour sweet oil on vanity's gusty waves, just how to give confidence to a timid speaker, and she slew more victims with those two weapons than with any other darts in her quiver.

She had been married early in her teens, and was still some years from the shades of fifty; and after her husband's death in 1331, she lived on in their Neapolitan Palazzo, and flattered herself into the good graces of Robert and Queen Sancia, though the latter, a gentle, timid lady, had no ease with her. It was the dove's instinctive dread of the hawk; but Catherine had the Valois craft (she was niece to Philippe le Bel), and, if she were a hawk, hid her talons with care, so that Jehanne loved her, most of the Provençaux were her friends, and even Cavaillon did not doubt her. Only Boccaccio read deeper, though wise-courtier-like, he said nothing save once to his friend Petrarch.

“The Empress bows in San Gennaro to the altar, but her only real god is a little steel statue named Power—top of a gold pedestal.”

Yet if her Imperial title were shadowy, her revenues from the rich lands of Achaia, Salonika, and the Morea were very solid, and not Jehanne herself went more splendidly at Court than this handsome, dark-haired,

stately woman, whose jewel-broidered Eastern stuffs and gems outshone even Duchess Agnes, her rival—to the latter's great disgust, for she was both younger and, feature for feature, more beautiful.

The bitterest drop, however, in the Empress's golden goblet of life was that her glorious niece was married to the thrice odious Andrea—and her own sons were free. Catherine's lips narrowed always at the thought. Yet Jehanne loved her well, for she spared no pains to win her trust; whatever girlish trouble she fell into, from the soiling of a robe to the flouting of an obnoxious minister, she had always her Aunt Catherine's ready sympathy and aid.

Although her Aunt Agnes was kind, she lacked the Empress's knack of drawing forth confidences, and so stood second with her.

Had the two royal dames been less ready to rival each other in small matters, they might have agreed better in greater, but of late a common cause had drawn them a little closer to each other—and that was their hatred of the Hungarians.

Those detestable arrogant boiars with their pandour moustaches and clanking swords! They filled the Castel, they swaggered in the streets, they set at naught every Neapolitan they dared, and of late even their respect for the higher nobles seemed on the wane.

As Catherine reached the alley end, and turned back towards the outer terrace, whence she could see the glorious blue of the Bay, with the shadowy mass of Capri in the distance, the afternoon haze just now turning it to a violet tint as the west-going sun left the east side of the island more shady, the sound of hasty steps roused her from her dreams.

It was the Bishop of Cavaillon and with him a tall,

grey-haired, stern-eyed man, whose rich fur-trimmed robe (which he wore even in the August heat), stamped him Hungarian.

"Well, Father?" she asked, her brows raised a little as she noted that the stranger yet wore spurs on his high leather boots and had, even though his mantle was dustless, the air of a man fresh from a journey.

Messengers were particularly interesting folk just then.

"I beg to present to Your Imperial Majesty, the Ban of Wallachia, Prince Stefan Barazad, come from King Ludwig with a letter to the Queen whom we now seek."

"She went to the olive-grove with Prince Andrea anon," said the Empress acknowledging the Ban's careful obeisance. "Go we thither."

"I have also a letter to his Maj—er—His Highness" said the Hungarian in very fair Italian, and then went scarlet.

Catherine started as she thought: "Clumsy brute! Here he shows his errand's secret ere ever he sees Jehanne! What imbeciles folks send on missions!"

They found Jehanne seated on a marble bench, before a little rustic hut, quaintly fashioned to hold a cage of curious birds.

With head thrown back, and lips screwed up she tried to imitate her teacher in the art of whistling like them; he was a limber young spark clad in a peach-coloured satin cotte-hardie, and whose handsome dark features seemed modelled from some young Greek wood god, and whose free manner and sunburned air belied his effeminate dress and jewelled hands, neck, and ears.

He was Count Enrico Caracciolo, and with him was his brother Ligorio, a pretty boy with a pleasantly insolent face, and four or five years younger.

Catherine's lips curled in a smile, as she saw under her lashes, the Ban's amazed look at the Queen, as both youths laughed and applauded her very passable imitation of Count Enrico's limpid notes.

"Listen aunt!" she cried, and whistled again.

She had cast the stern dignity she had worn while with Andrea, and the joyous February-humoured nymph Boccaccio once named her, shone forth, changing her whims like the sun and shower of the volatile month which is the Italian April.

Catherine solemnly presented the Ban and his errand.

"O!" cried she, with a whimsical look at Enrico. "Never care! I can do't again to-morrow! Alas! I must go within to read this most honourable document! I detest letters on a fine day! Pray you excuse me," as a conciliation to the Ban, "I am a very ready victim to idleness."

"Nay, Majesty, here is the letter which has never quitted my person by night or day since my most august master gave it to me with his own hand."

"What! Then I hope the seal was not hard to lie upon," quoth Jehanne frivolously. He looked utterly bewildered. Full of King Ludwig's warnings, he had expected to find a light and wanton woman, who made of their young Prince a toy, a laughing-stock, and whose mere freaks deepened into downright frailties. But here was a mere laughing child, who apologised prettily and needlessly for her first petulance! But a sharper shock awaited him.

Jehanne borrowed Enrico's jewelled dagger, cut

the white parchment thongs, took off the round red seal, and unrolled the letter.

It was in Latin, the secondary Court language of the day, which she read and spoke with ease, and soon yielded its contents.

Stripped of the pompous forms, the "Most dear and illustrious Cousins," and strings of titles and commendations at the end, this is what the Hungarian King said to his brother's wife—

"My patience wanes, and if you do not have Andrea crowned King of Naples as is his right, so that he shares your throne in all, I shall appeal to the Pope (to whom I have already written thereon), and if you still refuse to comply with my wishes, I shall come to Naples and enforce the matter myself."

Jehanne's whole person stiffened as with the closure of steel springs.

It was a severe woman who turned upon Enrico, and a voice like that of a judge giving sentence which bade him—

"Summon the Count of Squillace, the Lord Hugues des Baux, and the rest of the Privy Council to the Baron's Hall! We hold audience as to this!"

Rapidly she walked to the Castel; the others hardly able to keep pace with her, and not until she had flung herself into the great Throne seat, with its black velvet canopy diapered with white Anjevine fleur-de-lys, in the Hall, did she speak again.

"My most dear Father and High Chancellor," she said to Cavaillon, "yonder is the Chapel. Pray that I may have patience to deal with this."

"I do your bidding, daughter," said the Bishop, "but I am within call, remember."

He was deeply puzzled, for never before had she dismissed him thus.

He shook a warning head at her as he swept out of the carved stone doorway, well knowing that he alone held any spiritual restraint over her will, since the death of pious, gentle Queen Sancia, in the spring of that year.

It was fully half-an-hour before the Council had trickled man by man into the Hall, for they had been far to seek on such a blazing summer day.

Jehanne, fallen into a fit of dreams, sat back staring at the huge arches of carved wooden beams, of the high vaulted roof.

It was not until the door was flung wide open and Prince Andrea hurried in, that she roused herself, and adjusted the Throne's cushions so as to sit quite erect.

The last man of the Council to make obeisance was Geoffroy Marzano, Count of Squillace, the Lord High Admiral of the realm, a tall, wiry old man, who had been left Vice-Regent along with Cavaillon, by King Robert, and to hold that office till the Queen should have reached her majority at twenty-five.

This grizzled old sea-lord was one of the few plain-spoken men of the Court. Women's intrigues and palterings he held in high contempt, and his trenchant hew-and-thrust policy cut through the meshes of diplomatic skeins wherein any other would have got hopelessly snared.

Jehanne owed him many a good lesson in statecraft of the kind, and she shed on him a little flickering smile as he knelt to her, now. Prince Andrea he abhorred for a fool.

Next before him had come the three Seigneurs des Baux, of Provence, where their name spelled terror,

and whose banner with its fiery, sixteen-pointed comet, had never known defeat, all haughtily proud of their mighty House, whose founder was said to be the Mage Balthasar himself (whose name was indeed their war-cry)—

“ Au hasard
Balthasar ! ”

First of them was the Seigneur Raimond des Baux, Grand Chamberlain of Naples, a lanky, black-haired man of uncertain age but very certain eyes, and a nervous trick of playing with his chain of office—which distracted an opponent’s glances from his face.

Then Hugues des Baux, his brother Count d’Avelin, Grand Seneschal of Provence, a bold, rough, slash-about giant, with a roar like a bull in a battle-charge, and whom Pierre de Lascaris called “ The Elephant.”

Thirdly their cousin, Bertrand, Count of Montescavieux, the Grand Justicer of Naples. Professional soldier was writ large on his strong, lean person, and his cold brown eyes below his dark brown hair, showed all the steely qualities needful to his office.

He suggested the camp even in Court silks, and never even on the most peaceful occasions did he quit his heavy double-edged blade.

He was as nearly Count Amaury’s confidant as any man ever was, and this seemed to satisfy his sociable instincts, for he wore no lady’s colours in his cap, nor cared a fig for the trovere’s craft, beyond a camp song or so.

There were only a dozen other Provençal lords present, but a good many Neapolitans, beginning with Roger Sanseverino, Head of the famous House, a thin, grey-haired man of fifty, eagle-nosed, eagle-quick in

his stoop on any matter. Giacomo dei' Cavalcanti, a noted warrior, winner of much glory on land for King Robert, and Giovanni Chiaramonte, the victor of the Second Sicilian Naval Invasion, a great friend of Marzano's, and a born fighter. Filippo di Altamonte, and Tommaso Sanseverino, Roger's brother, Count of Marsico, also a famous soldier. Bernado d'Acquino, Count of Laureto, and Tristan Caracciolo, uncle to Enrico, a grave, quiet scholar, writer of that famous Chronicle which still survives.

Others there were, for whose names and styles it boots not, but who were the realm's highest, and most of whom had been King Robert's trusted Councillors.

Curiously, though in peace, the Neapolitans and Provençaux bickered jealously, in time of trouble they would shelve their private disputes, and follow Jehanne with the promptness of a single army called to drill, the Provençaux headed by the Des Baux, the Neapolitans by Roger Sanseverino and Marzano, who had, despite his southern birth, all the calm resolve and reserved stolidity of a northern man.

Below Jehanne and Andrea's dais were other chairs for the Princes of the blood, where now sat Prince Robert of Durazzo, and his cousin Philippe of Taranto, two fair-haired lads with the clear Anjevine features and quick Anjevine smile. Their brothers were absent on some frolic; and behind them on a little higher chair was the Empress, who sat bolt upright, and fixed the Hungarians with her eyes as they whispered among themselves.

When Prince Andrea had planted himself on his seat, and the Count of Squillace had coughed to intimate some one ought to speak, Jehanne broke the

long silence. She took the crushed letter and threw it at the latter.

“Read, my lord ! I shall choke if I attempt it !” she said.

The door swung back, and in strutted Friar Roberto di Milieto.

He had sallied up the hall to stand behind his master, when Jehanne stopped him.

“Is your confessor needful ?” she said to Andrea.

“Wherefore not ? The Church——” began he, but she waved the friar away.

“I sent my Bishop to pray for the good ordering of all here—your friar can very well go help him. Father, you will find the Bishop of Cavaillon in the Chapel.”

The friar’s beady eyes fairly goggled in his purple face. He puffed out swollen lips and walked slowly out, only to run against Duchess Agnes of Durazzo, gorgeous in a pale blue silk gown and girdle of pearls, fluttering in like some fluffy bird.

“My lady mother would be late to her own funeral !” grinned Count Robert to Prince Philippe. “What is a-foot ? If Jehanne’s eyes count for aught she is in a rare rage, and we shall be repaid for our disturbed siestas.”

“E’en so !” returned the other equally low-voiced, as he passed to his cousin his elegant gold comfit-box. “See old Kill-Joy’s face also ! By Venus, this promises some fun ! Sh—h, listen !”

Through its florid Latin phrasing Count Geoffroy read the King of Hungary’s imposing letter ; the Provençaux heard with grim immobility, the lighter Neapolitans with open dismay, and the Hungarians with the air of hearing something already heard, and

with scarcely suppressed triumph—that is, their younger more careless spirits did.

“I well see the King’s wishes for his brother’s welfare!” said Jehanne in a curiously level tone. “He would see him wear my crown—Bene! But he forgets that when my grandsire joined my hand to that of the Prince, there was no mention then made, that he should ever be more than my Consort. Why did not Hungary speak then?”

The Hungarians looked at each other. Empress Catherine smiled to herself. Jehanne went on: “I do not say so much about the King’s motive, for that is easily understood, but the tone of command is what offends both my own and my crown’s dignity! I refuse to comply with such demands, and I look to you, my lords, to support my resolution!”

From her party rose the hum of protest befitting this. Robert of Durazzo caught such scraps as: “What? Insolence! San Gennaro—as if we were a provincial burgher-guild! They will ask the sceptre itself next!”

At last Squillace hushed them.

“Most High Majesty! Clearly Naples and Provence lie as ever at your royal feet! And thus we can instantly answer with one voice to King Ludwig’s demands—No!”

Andrea, grown white, sprang to his feet excitedly, his hands playing with his silken girdle-pouch.

“For sure he has a letter from dear brother Ludwig in’t,” tittered Prince Philippe to his cousin.

“Hungarians, I beg you to note that the Queen’s Council is treating the demands of Hungary with contempt!” he cried. “This must be discussed! We cannot have the answer to her king so lightly decided!”

The Count of Squillace forgets we have not yet had the vote of my nobles—it must be weighed gravely——” His efforts at restraint were painful.

The Queen waved her hand.

“Let us hear the Hungarian advocate then !”

Matthias Bathory, the powerful Ban of Croatia, rose. He was Andrea’s right-hand man, and along with Friar Robert made most of the arrows shot by the Prince. He wore the half-eastern dress of his land, and his fierce eyes had much of the oriental in their subtle fires.

“Majesties and nobles ! The Prince has voiced the Hungarian wishes ! Our King has Naples’ welfare at heart, and has viewed with sadness the Queen’s attitude towards her husband. For what is more sorrowful than to see husband and wife at variance ? And what more blessed than to bring peace between them ? My dear lord, the King, has seen (as with the eyes of all Europe) that a king a needful upon the throne of Naples. To rule alone is no task for a woman”—Jehanne smiled scornfully—“and moreover so young a woman. It is highly needful for her to have a strong help therewith ; for even as husband rules wife, so does a King a—Kingdom—and this is truth !”

Jehanne frowned sharply as he paused, and a growl ran through her ranks, as he went on : “Thus, since we see plainly proven that it is right the Prince should rule also, and that Hungary wishes to aid Naples, I call on your support ! Let there be peace over it ! I assure you that Hungary’s King has the matter deeply at heart—so deeply that he will not halt at re-asking his question. Nay, more ! I, his minister, tell you plainly that he is most earnest in saving that

he will come to Naples to arrange the matter himself, and if he should be provoked—but I cannot further interpret my King's thoughts.

“Only war—civil war—is a horrible thing—a needless curse; and I call on her Majesty to relent, and revoke her decision, give her loving spouse his rights, and so stand honoured in wifely love and glory!”

There were twenty sword-hilts being hard gripped in the Queen's party, as many dark Magyar scowls among Andrea's; there was a hot storm-bubble ready to burst if ever there was, when suddenly came a ridiculous anticlimax.

“Oh, oh! I am faint! Clemence! Lazy maid, run quickly for my pomander!—some perfume—anything!” tinkled the pretty plaintive voice of Duchess Agnes, clear in the deep hush following the Ban's speech.

Count Robert laughed outright, and so did Prince Philippe—laughter which was infectious, and Jehanne's men broke out into a roar quite fatal to the effect of the Ban's oration. Only Jehanne, too strung with emotion to join, sat with parted lips, staring at her husband as he stood there. His screech rose over the hum like that of an angry sea-bird in a storm.

“By St. Ladislaus! I will not be mocked! Hear you that? O idiots all! I am the King!” His rage mastered him completely.

“No one mocks you, Prince!” said Jehanne, suddenly alert again. “We do but laugh at my aunt of Durazzo.”

At the cool answer he fumed the more, and the giddy Count and Prince nudged each other—the only

people who really enjoyed the disorder. He turned on the hall like a snapping terrier at bay :

“ You go too far, you Neapolitans and Provençaux ! By St. Andrea of Pruth, my patron, I will have order in my subjects ! I say I am King now in fact, and shall be King in name, so soon as my brother says the word. Madam wife, you cannot always insult your husband as you do to-day ! I will send your reply to him. You will have me crowned King so soon as we can get the Pope’s Legate here to do it. You will begin by ordering quiet your unruly people here——”

“ My people ? I thought you called them yours anon ! ” came her biting answer. “ Now, Prince, this grows too raffish for our Council. You hear Naples and Provence reply to you ? Even were my private wishes yours, I could not go against my faithful barons’ wills. It is they who fight for me, they who die in my cause. I will not put on them a Hungarian yoke to please any king alive, and there you have my final answer—No ! ”

The cheer that followed threatened to rend the roof, but the sharp snarls of the Prince’s party rushed close behind it, like the backward hiss of a receding wave. Jehanne sprang to her feet, a flame in her eye that set Marzano a-foot also.

“ Not a man of this Council has remembered that we hold the power to check both Hungary and all other dissentients to our will ! ” she cried. “ I have the power to dissolve the Regency—*if* the Council give consent ! And if I do get thus sole power, I swear by the blood of San Gennaro, that I will keep my throne secure, down to the last man and last ounce of gold in my queendom !

“Now insist that I cede you the Crown if you dare!”

Had Vesuvius in convulsion burst the earth below, and thrown up a stream of lava in the midst of that vast room's floor, the consternation could have been no greater.

Every man present knew that the Queen had seized the deadliest weapon within her reach, and that if the Council and two Regents were agreed upon dissolution, and to hand the Queen the reins of Naples, ere her attaining her majority, then the power of Hungary was indeed upon the wane.

There was no disputing King Robert's will, without setting the other European powers and the Pope by the ears, for to impugn it was to outrage all the laws of the Empire.

Marzano sniffed the air as a horse does before the coming thunderstorm, eyed his young mistress adoringly, and laughed a short noiseless laugh.

“I give my consent if the Queen wishes. My will is Queen Jehanne's will,” he said briefly. The Council looked at each other in utter amazement. But they were loyal to their leaders. The Empress leaned far forward, her gaze hot on Jehanne.

“You have my vote to do as you will, fair niece!” she said.

“Ha! San Grail!” snorted Roger Sanseverino, his thin face working with excitement. “I speak for Naples! We are your men in this matter! The Council may be dissolved—unless the Prince hears reason, and agrees that we still rule for you, and save you the trouble of refusing King Ludwig! We lack only the Bishop of Cavaillon's word, and——”

“And mine! I uphold the Queen!” shouted the three des Baux, with one voice.

“Fetch him hither, then!” cried Jehanne, and a page sped out chapelwards.

But both Croatia, and the other great Hungarian Voivode, Nicholas of Transylvania (Niccolo Ungaro to Neapolitans) both saw farther than their master. They knew they must gain time, and they feared the explosion of the train they had fired that day, and took hasty counsel together. Just as Cavaillon appeared, Croatia rose again, simmering with suppressed wrath but prudence masking it.

“The Prince will take further counsel ere he decides more,” he announced. “It will be to the advantage of neither Queen nor State if the Council act thus hastily. A grave thing, my lords! It must be weighed at length——”

Jehanne broke him off, with impatiently lifted hand.

“Wait! No—our Lady! I have told you my reply, even if I wait till doomsday! Father”—to Cavaillon—“you will indite for *ME* a scroll to my Cousin of Hungary and say that for many reasons *I* regret that *I* cannot comply with his demands, and that I trust he will not insist on them further, as we are prepared to resist them with equal firmness! Enough! I have spoken! My most loyal subjects, from my heart I thank you for your support in this affair. Your interests are my interests, and I will stand by you as you have done by me. The audience may disperse. I will inform my sister of its deeds, and Count of Squillace, do you tell the Bishop what has passed in his absence.”

In a perfect hubbub, Andrea, too angry to keep

from reviling every one openly, was dragged off to his apartments by the prudent Croatia and Transylvania. Jehanne, thrusting aside all questions and questioners, went up to the royal rooms on the first floor of the Castel.

CHAPTER IV

JEHANNE's favourite room in the Royal Suite was more like a rich casket than aught else, and thither she went from the ominous Council, passing to it through the Chapel, from which a wonderful spiral staircase like a twisting shell led up to an anteroom gorgeously frescoed from ceiling to floor, and out of which led the Queen's own bedchamber.

Through many exquisite stained-glass windows the evening light streamed, touching up the sparkles on a hundred costly glitters within. The walls, wherever they were not richly painted, were hung with pale blue brocade worked alternately with golden fleur-de-lys and nine-pointed crowns, and the sandalwood furniture was inlaid with silver and mother-of-pearl, while long Venetian mirrors reflected all the costly litter of a young and splendid Queen—fans, caskets, gem set tazze, and countless precious trifles.

By one open casement on a low stool, a woman sewed the seed pearls on a dainty glove, and a girl knelt by her on a pile of blue and white cushions, at work on its fellow. The woman was tall, dark, severe of mien, with black hair strained back under a curious coif of silk kerchiefs, proclaiming her Sicilian. She was Filippa, called by the Provençaux "La Catenoise," for she had been wife to a poor

Catanian fisherman when Queen Sancia had seen her while in Sicily, and taken a fancy to have her for Jehanne and Marie's nurse.

Thence, however, she had risen steadily, and when her deserted fisherman died she had married an extraordinary character, a Moor once a slave, but whom his master, Count Raimondo di Cabano, a childless man, had freed, educated and adopted as a son, and whose title Jehanne granted him at his benefactor's death. Filippa's faculty for self-education was wonderful, and she had achieved her new rôle of Countess most admirably, while her daughter by her first marriage, Sancia, had of course had many advantages in her mother's rise, and at the age of eighteen married the old Count of Morcone and became Jehanne's lady-in-waiting, while her half-brother Berto had been made Count of Eboli and Majordomo of the Queen's household.

Jehanne knelt beside Filippa and hid her face on her shoulder, her pride cast with her Council's cares.

"Giannina mia! What is wrong, carissima?" asked "La Catenoise" in a soft, caressing tone. "What grieves my sweet? Andrea?"

"I shall be myself again presently. They have driven me over far! Next they will ask my head!" She told them what had passed, and the two looked at each other with tightened lips.

"Surely, Friar Robert is bottom of this coil!" said Filippa. "The Prince would never clutch at the crown (and its cares) half so eagerly were he unbacked by that thrice abominable priest! Were I thee, adorata mia, I would make an end of the wretch! Make the Pope remove him from Naples—and then see if Andrea be as flighty!"

"I would—but they would make a real end of me if so! I dare scarce eat or drink, and oft I dream of a drawn knife. It would wear out a bronze statue! Why, oh, why is a Queen wedded in hate!"

She strode up and down clenching her slender hands.

"Cheer thee, cuore dolce! All times pass. Think no more of it now. Thou hast done all possible, and the saints will aid the rest. Write to the Holy Father thy side of it, and of the friar's mischief. Show Andrea thou mockest his threats—go sing on the water with the other gay band. Shall I tell Berto to order the feluccas?"

Sancia looked up, her gaze kindling.

"Majesty, you were sublime! But it means war——" She did not heed her mother's sign to be silent.

"Ay—I know," said Jehanne wearily. "But it would lift the Hungarian weight here—for a time at least——"

"One of their accursed Black Ritters, of Conrad the Wolf's brigands, has run poor Giacomo Sanseverino through the throat last night—he may die; and another insulted Berto over a nothing—an accidental push against a wall. Berto apologised, and he cursed all monkey slaves."

"Oh, Royal State! Oh, Royal Mockery!" cried Jehanne impetuously. "Were Andrea in my place he would go mad! I have all the burden and none of the power! Would I could hang every Hungarian over all the walls of Naples! I am overwrought to-day. I feel I must speak did they all hear me!"

"And to whom else shouldst speak, if not to us, cara? We are safe and silent," said Filippa tenderly, yet with a fierce gleam in her eye.

"I know—ah, how my head aches!" She clasped it with painful gesture and pushed back the golden waves from her temples as if to lift a weight. She leaned from the window overhanging the broad white terrace, with its row of tall statues, and a red-clad figure sauntered by.

It was Amaury, who held up to her a glorious crimson rose he had gathered, and she deftly caught and kissed it as he threw it aloft.

She always kissed roses, which were, she declared, the kisses of Venus.

"We are going on the Bay to-night, Count! It is full moon. Stay—get me that sketch of the decoration for the Lists' entrance at Capua, that you promised. I will descend."

She let Sancia array her in a long dark blue silk robe, powdered with golden crescents and stars, and presently floated down the broad marble path, like some graceful swan on the clear waters of Pompeian Sarno, and he greeted her with an impromptu couplet which rhymes in Provençal:

"If thou, my swan-queen on the ripples clear,
Should'st pass adown the Styx, the waters dread
Would straightway turn to an Elysian stream
To worthily reflect your glories white."

"Fantast!" she cried, yet not ill-pleased. "You grow as bad as Arnaud and the rest of them! Show the drawings forthwith."

"Your will is law, Majesty!" mimicking, cleverly enough, the Count of Squillace; and she laughed gaily.

"Excellent!" she said, of the drawings. "You should be an artist instead of soldier, Count. If war injured your arm or sight, 'twould be a real loss to art."

Nay ! Protest not that you will die of delight because I say so—leave that to idler tongues—and take my advice seriously, and study in the Schools. Then you can, maybe, paint me some of the new Chapel's walls in Santa Chiara. Passaggiando—I am almost decided upon its title.

“Grandsire wished to devote it to the Queen of Heaven, and as 'twas his last thought, I deem Santa Maria L'Incoronata a happy name.”

Amaury raised his brows in surprise. Never since the days of their earliest acquaintance, when she had had a child's freedom of speech, had she spoken so confidentially apart with him.

“It could not be better,” he answered. “I am sincere in agreeing with you ; did I not think so, I would differ, and trust to your gracious mood for pardon. Also 'tis useless to feign aught before your keen eyes. It is my firm belief that you read all our souls as Giovanni does his books, and I fear what you see in some of our young feather-brains must be uneasy reading—seeing how matters are turning, when strength of both head and arm is so needful.”

It was her turn to be surprised. Here was frivolous Amaury in a much better light, to her present frame of mind. The delicate flattery of her perception she knew for truth, but the straightforward tone of the rest pleased her more. She sought him, keenly, but his eyes met hers as passionlessly and frankly as another woman's might have done.

“I must speak out upon these things,” he pursued, heedless of the etiquette whereby he should have awaited her answer. “For you heard—this afternoon?—and though I would not weary you, I know you think only of it.”

“What can I do?” she said fiercely, her pent-up feeling breaking through her efforts at temporary forgetfulness. “I wish that my threats may come true—that the Regency may be dissolved, so that I reign at last! Ah! Then I will break openly with Hungary—and it may vanquish me and slay me! But I shall have peace at last from this vile world! Nevermore could such dogs insult me! Welcome the end! I must have either peace or freedom!”

“Eh, Holy Shroud! Say not so darkly! Dread not such end! You heard that Provence is with you to a man, and where it leads Naples must follow! The Ban’s threats are folly, so far as they seem prophecy! War—there may be, but I, Savoy, assure you that the only result would be the freedom of Naples from Hungary’s yoke! Call Europe to aid you! You, fair and tearful, would enlist even St. Antony’s sympathies!—how much more those of France and the Empire? The Holy See—is the hardest to win, but gold is great when all else fails!”

He was the Red Count now with a vengeance: his eloquence flamed up, his eyes glowed, his voice rang like sword on shield hard and clear. He noted the answering flash in her eyes, and the sharp quiver that ran through her from head to foot, like the leap of a bow, respondent to the string’s tension.

“You raise new hope!” she cried. “Yet can I rely upon my forces? There is my uncertainty—’tis so easy for them to protest, but when the reality arrives—will they keep true? As one soldier to another, tell me—Can we drive out the foes?”

“We can! Upon the White Rood we can! But you, the Queen, must lead us! We must be led by Anjou, we must have Queen Jehanne at our head—we

trust you as the Madonna herself ! I am about in the camps at all hours—and ever I hear the rough men-at-arms say, ‘ If She would, She could free us ! ’ In the poorest Vici, the children say alike, ‘ If the Queen would, she could send hence the Hungarians. ’

“ While the barons—you heard ! Thus I bid you take hope, and lead us fearless where you will—for the people’s souls are with you—only they of Naples fear the Hungarians as yet. But the Provençaux do not. . . . ”

“ I am proud to be the Countess of Provence ! ” She was heating white-hot at his martial fire, and the high pride of Anjou rose to meet the flame also. Then as suddenly she sobered, and lowered her high-held head. “ Yet I doubt the Neapolitan lords. I am so alone—for even Marie would hold Charles’s safety above the kingdom’s fate, I fear ! We have shared much trouble, but never red war itself. I tremble for my friends’ lives, too, though not for my own—little as I think they may care for me—— ”

They were close to a little arbour in the nook of a wall quite hidden from any prying eyes ; the gardens were full of such shelters.

He knelt, and put his hands between hers, in the vassal’s way to his seigneur.

“ My liege lady, my Countess ! ” he said solemnly, as if before an altar, “ I am going to be bold enough to ask your trust in these great things. Once have I laid hands in yours as Count of Savoy ; now I ask leave to lay them as man and knight ! Then I did homage for my lands, and gave you right over them : now I give you right over my soul and its truth ! So aid me our Lady ! By the Holy Shroud, our House of Savoy’s sacred relic, I swear ! ”

The little tremble in her voice as she had confessed her fears had set him ablaze under his calm resolve to play the devoted councillor only, but his control was great and he looked up at her with the serene high-purposed gaze of a devotee before a shrine.

Jehanne gripped his hands closely in hers, prey to three emotions: first, her sharp longing for action against her foes; second, relief at his new attitude; and lastly, warm comfort in the strength of his touch. It felt proof of his power as lord of Savoy—power which was now wholly hers. She thrilled at it, but said nothing. He rose and stood by her, yet did not meet her gaze; under his downcast lids a very different fire from patriotism's flame glowed, but that she could not see.

"Say only that you trust me now," he said very quietly.

"I do believe and trust you! And in state matters you shall have my inmost confidence——"

"But—in private——" he hazarded, startled and chilled.

She looked at him as at a needless interrupter.

"Why? Have we not ever been good friends? Foolish Count!

"Now that I am sure you wish me for friend as well as Queen, now that you have dropped that troveresque tone which became you not so well as this your soldier's humour (despite your famous canzone, mon ami!), I know with whom to deal, and can unveil my thoughts somewhat. We are true friends! My hand upon it, comrade!"

He clasped it firmly, then unpermitted bent and kissed it twice, and then, as a long shadow fell on the terrace without, flung back his head and sang out in

his pleasant, well-trained voice a snatch of a canzone of Raimond de Miraval's :

“ Amor me fai cantar et esbaudir
Bona domna nos deu d'amor gequir— ! ”

Boccaccio was taking a little stroll in the setting sun's light, and by his nodding head and moving lips, composing something.

“ Methinks the other song goes better, Count ! ” said Jehanne distinctly, as if they had only spoken of songs. “ Aha ! 'Ser Giovanni ! What are you about ? ”

“ I will fetch you the other song-words, Altesse,” said Amaury hastily.

“ While I walk with Messer here.” She went out upon the terrace, and Amaury did a risky thing, considering what had just passed. A little golden hook had fallen from her gown to the arbour floor ; he dropped his handkerchief over it and, as she passed out, lifted it to his lips and kissed it with all the heat he dared not lay upon her hand.

But she spied him, and that one little surreptitious act set all her doubts of his meanings afloat in her mind again ; however, Boccaccio's cheerful face diverted her attention, and she slipped her hand through his arm as Amaury vanished.

Below them, bathed in floods of the wonderful evening light, with its changing shadows varying in colour like the rainbow, from soft gold to blue and heliotrope, soon to deepen into purple night, lay the gardens, with their winding walks and little pleasaunces and fountains, among the palms and olives. Jehanne sighed and looked at the sun as his vast round shield dropped over the far western horizon

behind Misenium, and turned to the King of Story-Makers beside her.

He of all the Court went nearest to understanding her; he studied her whims, her rages, her gentler hours, with never-ending interest and affection, without the least servility or self-seeking motive; for he was assured of her favour, firmly based in her confidence, and never halted to tell her the truth—even when it was unpleasing.

“Light of the World : Luce del Mondo, high honour of Italy,” he called her, and for him that light was never dimmed; for had her sins been ten times greater, had every word her enemies said been true, his belief in her would have remained unshaken. His affection for her was the firmer and more brotherly-true, since his passionate heart was given eternally to the exquisitely lovely woman known to the world since, as La Fiametta and to the Court then, as Madame Marie de Sabran, Countess of Acquino—whom Jehanne also knew and loved well.

“’Ser Nino,” she said, using the affectionate diminutive she always did in private. “Here is a strange question. What is the truest Love?”

“Fanciulla mia!” raising his brows in utter wonderment, “you may as well ask me—what is life! You—to ask me such a thing! A child’s question, Reginnina! Why?”

“I knew you would start at my seeming folly. Wait—I mean what I say. I did not ask the wider meaning of casual love, but of the high True Love, which we seek always and never find. What is it?”

“I have spent most part of my life in trying to define that very thing, carissima! And although I am said to have some indifferent skill in language,

and some craft in the Gaie Science, yet I will admit to you that even at my age I cannot yet tell you. Love! Why, you may as well ask me to describe to you the existing shades of light in a sunset without a given example—for your question also has no example. You must have circumstances to go upon—and even then there is no fixed standard! Yet—amazement! Who should know more of Love than you, the Queen of a hundred hearts, the judge of as many Courts d'Amour? It is heresy of you to ask me—*fi donc! ma Provençale!*”

“’Tis just there I stumble! The Love we have here is not the Love whereof I ask you. The singing, protesting, swooning Love of our troveres I doubt entirely. It seems to me the Love of sunshine and holiday as light as the airs it goes to on the *vielle*; nay more, I am certain that half the clouds it professes to weather by troth keeping, are shams created only to disperse, and that in the storms of opposition, danger and death, it would fly away fast as a bird. True, our young men draw swords on each other for what they call Love, but would they do a like amount of suffering if they gained no glory therefrom and their sacrifice were unknown? I have long sought the Court for such a case, but never found one. Or, again, they endure long for Love, but they always ask a mortal reward in the end—never serve the spirit only. The Courts d'Amour and their votaries' pleasant flowery chains of bondage to one lady only strike me as too weak for a great, true test. Take we Arnaud de Coutignac. He serves me, he loves me. So far good. But were I not Queen, were I not fairer than most women (folly to disguise that I know it), I am sure he would not thus travel

half Europe over for a glance at me, write songs to my very shoon, and perform a dozen fine actions in my name. He would even suffer death if it might be known 'twas for me, and that I would weep a little for him. But it is not—no, ten times no!—True Love, the Love that sees the Soul and loves that alone, through all dangers, all tortures. I cannot believe that this Love which I have imaged in my heart exists. Tell me, 'Ser Nino, your thought. Does Love still walk the world?"

His face lighted with a sudden animation, and he answered in a curious restrained voice, overflowing with eagerness, like one suddenly questioned on his heart's dearest subject, and yet represses his words, fearing to drown his listener in his own enthusiasm.

"Love once ruled the whole world, ma mie—once in Greece, when the thirst for gold and other follies was scarce known, and Love went hand in hand with valour. Now he has left the unworthy earth, and only reveals himself in blessed visions and to few people; yet, when those few behold him, they are his high priests and adorers all their lives. You ask me what this Love is like? Eh, santissima! It is a vast sweeping wave, that takes all with it, and never heeds the suffering it causes. Like sunrays, there is no keeping it out where it wills to enter—surely it finds a chink, screen you never so well! It comes in the hour when it is least expected—then beware! For if those rays once reach your inner heart, they are like sunshine on the closed calyx of a flower—it begins to open, and though you would fain close the leaves again, it is impossible—and it scorches and burns like flame. But the flame is one which you hug, and like a vestal worship even when it slays!

This Love is heedless of either adverse circumstances or rewards in material shape. No sacrifice is too great, no barrier too high for it to break down, and none who have felt its utter sorrow, can ever regret its passage for there is in its deepest depths a joy which outweighs all the rest. Only, as I have said, it is not a heeder of mortal frames or mortal failings; it is the voice of soul to soul, and in that communion none other can be heard—and there you have True Love as nearly as ever I can give it to your mind!”

“Ay! This is the Love I figured—you read my thoughts! But, save your own case only, I am sure there is none of it in Naples! Would I could find just another example to assure me it yet lives——”

“Cara, there are some. But not at Court—only shadows of the real glory there. To see that you and Sancia must put on simple mantles some night, and come with me to the city where among the folk I can show you something like a humble copy of our ideal, of True Love’s self.”

“I will come,” she answered, clasping her hands behind her head, the dark blue of the long falling sleeves showing her beautiful arms, white as swan’s wings. “Yea, Love is not at Court, for all our talk of him there—though the troveres’ conceits are dainty and charming—still, they do serve to help me picture the Reality.”

“Ah, cara mia!” cried he, carried away by his own deeply-stirred memories of the Flame as it came to him, forgetful of discretion. “If only You might feel the flame itself! Ah, Santa Vergine! It would be worth all the pain I myself have suffered in my life to know that you, too, have Lived.”

He stopped short, afraid to say more ; but Jehanne was watching the crimson sunset clouds with the dreamy air and smile of one who wanders afar in fair fields of thought.

“ I have seen one curious result of the Court-Love, which we are agreed is not the True,” she said slowly. “ It blinds each lover to the other’s failings. Foulquet and Erminetta, now. Though outwardly they scorn each other, secretly they find no faults ; but I can spy a dozen.—Meseems even in True Love I could not be so blind——”

“ No, by our Lady’s Crown ! ” swore Messer Giovanni. “ But theirs is not the True, nor could You ever be as they are ! For you know well enough, Queen Jehanne, that there lives no soul worthy to be your peer in the kingdom of Love ; and if there ever did, then God help Naples and you ! There ! ”

She still mused, and smiled half sadly, half hopefully, with faith in her idea ; and then sighed, as if brought from clouds to earth again.

“ You see far and clearly, ’Ser Nino. No—I shall never know True Love, and ’tis a merciful loss, for placed as I am—what could come ? ”

“ Yet see—I will tell you somewhat I have never even told Marie. It was truly the root of my mad question anon ; I wished to see if you defined aught like my feelings when this odd thing happed.

“ Once—long ere Prince Andrea came—I had a dream. Dream or vision—I can never decide which it was. One night Filippa had left me, and the light burned low, and, bene !—I never can tell if I slept or woke, but suddenly I seemed upon a great stretch of sandy shore, like Baia, alone.

“ Then from the sea floated, dimly as things do in

dreams, a little cloud of smoke, which stopped and parted before me, and a face—distinct as yours is now—looked into mine. 'Twas that of a man of, perchance, thirty, the handsomest, yet most powerful, I ever saw. The features were straight, the skin very white, the brows straight also, and rather darker than the short waves of reddish gold hair which fell to the collar, and the mouth was firm even in its smile. But the eyes! Ah, 'Ser Nino!—they looked into mine with a look I never saw before—I fear I never shall again! I could have cried for joy and gladness—the strangest, maddest whirl of thoughts took me. I knew him well, yet—how could I? I had no fear or shyness, and he leaned downwards, for he was very tall, and kissed my lips, and the tumult this set astir in me must have roused me from the dream, for with a puff of mist all vanished, and I lay on my bed, blinking at the dim light again! I can limn him no better—yet he has haunted me ever since. I seek him vainly in all new-comers to Court. He was too splendid to be mortal! He was a vision of some old god haunting this Campanian shore! Perhaps he was Apollo—who knows?"

She smiled, and kissed her hand airily to the setting sun. "Symbol of the Bright-Haired God, all hail!" she said; and then, as if she rather repented her revelation, turned sharply on her hearer.

"Understand, 'Ser Nino, I have never told any but you! I must within now to prepare for our sail this evening."

She left him musing at the terrace-end, over the wall, just below one of the great towers; and as he watched her go he murmured aloud, unconsciously: "Even as she says, her soul sleeps! But woe to her

throne and her enemies if ever that soul awakes, and Apollo appears ! ”

Meanwhile, Prince Andrea, with Friar Robert at his elbow, was laboriously scrawling a most venomous epistle to his brother, King Ludwig.

CHAPTER V

THE disguised Prince of Taranto and his sister rode merrily toward Naples, and as they jogged along the white road on their mules, Louis unfolded his plan.

“Ma petite, in Naples we shall need care lest we are known?”

She nodded.

“Philippe and Robert are easily avoided, as both are unobservant of humble folk; but our mother——”

“Has hawk’s eyes——”

“Ay, also Messer Niccolo. Neither must spy us. We will only amuse ourselves by attending riotous feasts where he would not go. We have enough gold to last. And we had best pass as husband and wife, to save you any unwelcome gallantries. Hey, but we will have a merry time, if all goes well! I can only just call to mind the streets of Naples, where I passed as a little lad, but the Castel I mind better—enough to find our way now. How dark and grand the mountains rise—yon pass will take us over the first part of the range, and by to-morrow nightfall we shall cross it. May we meet no worse company than ourselves.”

“I fear none while with you, Louis,” returned she; and so they rode, he beguiling the way for her with stories of his wild adventures in Greece.

No more befell them between the mountains and Salerno, but at the little hamlet of Pavosa, half a day's ride from thence, on the Naples road, Louis's mule cast a shoe. There was a decent inn at Pavosa, and thither went Marguerite while he sought a smith. She sat under the vine by its door, singing to herself, when suddenly the landlord came out all in a scare.

"Madonna Santissima!" he cried to her, and the few children playing about. "Within, all! Prestissimo! I see from the roof a train of armed riders! It is safer to make sure—Ai! Ai!"

Louis just then returned, and together they entered the cortile, round which opened the various rooms, and asked for rooms for the night. The man hastily pointed to two, and dashed to bar his gate, just as a great trampling sounded in the road.

"Ai! Gli Ungeresi!" said the terrified host, as the gate threatened to give way under pounding of spear-butts. At a gruff command, however, and some reassurance, he opened it.

Meanwhile, the brother and sister entered the sala, whence from the hole which did duty for window, they saw the dreaded Free Company of Hungary dismount from shaggy little horses and take from saddles their fur-trimmed provision-bags, to camp for the night, talking in guttural tones the while.

Two hundred and fifty wild men they were, in half-eastern mail over fantastic garments, lean, active, and armed every one with lances pointed and keen, with the colours of Hungary on the leader's pennon; he was a mailed knight, tall as Louis, and mounted on a black horse, and he stalked into the cortile giving orders. The host ran in to take wine from a hutch.

"Who is it?" asked Louis, as he fetched the flasks.

"Santa Vergine send him safe away! It is Corrado Lupo himself! He rides to collect the Prince's dues from his Duchy of Salerno. He is terribelissimo. Maria! send him away!" He ran out with the wine.

"Conrad the Wolf!" said Louis ruefully. "Let us retire to our rooms; such as he are best avoided."

But they were too late. The famous condottiero strode in, one little Hunnish-looking squire bearing his shield, with its bloody-fanged wolf sable, another coming to unlace his mail.

The kingdom held no dreader name than his, for he was perhaps the most ferocious of the many fierce leaders of mercenaries who infested it, and his savagery had earned him his name of Wolf in Italy and Hungary. Just now he and his band were serving Prince Andrea nominally, and their own pockets actually, and they were sworn men to King Ludwig when at home, though the Wolf was himself German-born. He was professedly collecting the Prince's revenues of Salerno, and incidentally raiding the more distant villages, on his own account.

"This accounts for the few peasants we met to-day," thought Louis. "Fear of him must have cleared the country of them."

"Who are these?" asked Conrad of the trembling host.

"Please, Illustrious One, they are singers——"

"They may stay," said the Wolf briefly in fairish Italian. "I like a song after a meal! Bring hot meat! Sharp!"

The squires unlaced him, and he sat down, nodding

casually to the pair, who would have left the room, but he checked them with a :

“Halt ! Heard you not that I would have a song ? Have a drink with me first to tune your voices ? ”

The squires vanished to forage the kitchen, as he doffed his helm.

He looked his name indeed, with his fierce, narrow eyes, deep-set under a low forehead fringed with short black hair, and his thin mouth curled ominously when he smiled, showing two long eye teeth like his animal namesake ; and his glance made Marguerite go strangely hot, and set Louis feeling instinctively for his dagger in his tunic’s folds.

Yet the Wolf spoke quite pleasantly.

“Whence are ye, Sir of the Gaie Science ? A Provençal or Frenchman, by your dress ? ”

“My wife and I are French,” said Louis, without any title of respect. “We fear our songs may not be fair exchange for your hospitality.”

“I will risk that,” said Conrad amiably enough. “Hoch ! Here is supper ! Let us eat ! ”

They ate of a fair meal, of roast kid, fowls, and excellent wine, and to Louis’s astonishment, Conrad talked of song and music in a surprisingly adept way the while. This relieved Marguerite of her first fears, and she answered his jests and questions cheerfully enough ; but Louis noted with growing anxiety that the Wolf rarely looked away from her, and after supper, while she sang, the expression on his fierce face confirmed his uneasiness. He began to look for an escape.

Alack ! A glance through the window showed the ground covered already with sleeping Hungarians,

every man rolled in his great fur mantle, his horse picketed to his lance beside him, while the rest of the inn was doubtless so packed as well, by the snores and shields which clattered on stone floors, as the latest comers lay down.

The night wore on, and desperately Louis realised a move must be made.

“We beg your permission to retire now, my lord,” he said, and rose; but ere Conrad could reply, one of the squires entering handed him a letter. He read it, and gave the man a rapid order in Hungarian, some words of which Louis fortunately understood, as Messer Niccolo Accaijuolo had had a young Hungarian secretary, who came to learn Italian and answer his Hungarian correspondence. From him he had learned enough to converse brokenly, and to gather now from Conrad’s order that the troop was to rouse itself and march somewhere or other there and then.

The squire vanished, the Wolf rose and, with a courteous good-night, strode after him, leaving them staring at each other, in relief.

“Thank St. Anne!” said Louis. “Now to bed, or, rather, you to yours; for, my dear, I lie across your door this night, lest any of them remain here.”

“Come presently, then, when I am disrobed,” she said.

She crossed the cortile full of arming, hurrying, sleepy men to her room, and began to unpack her baggage, which took her a few minutes, which she thought longer; and so, when a tap came at the door, she expected her brother, and opened it an inch with: “Not yet, Louis”—but——

It swung wider, and then closed again. A dark

figure, mailed and cloaked, caught her, mute with fright, to him in a grip of steel.

"Aha, sweet jongleuresse!" said the Wolf's voice. "Didst think I had left so fair a bird to fly loose with such a crow as yond man o' thine? Room in my cage for thee, and we fly thither now!" kissing her fear-stiffened lips.

"O, Louis!" she croaked rather than called. He, now listening without for her summons to rest, fairly shot in, and in a flash acted.

Conrad was full-mailed save his helm, which hung from his arm by its leather laces, ready to don. Louis had no weapon but his sword and dagger, both too light against plate-strengthened chain; but he had his wit, worth more than either. By the door lay a wooden stool, which instantly he snatched up.

Marguerite, quick-witted as he, saw his arm rise, felt the Wolf's grip loosen, and twisting her hands free clung with all her weight to his wrists. The stool crashed on his bare head, and he fell to the floor, dragging her with him as his senses left him. A groan was all the sound which escaped him.

She struggled up and fell into Louis's arms.

"Oh, caro! We are lost. His men will slay us, certes! Is he dead?"

"No! His head is over tough—he breathes," replied Louis, feeling the fallen man's heart and wrist. Then he sharply shot the door bolt.

"If we declared our rank, would that not save us?" faltered she.

"No! These condotti ever judge first and try afterwards! They would hang the nameless jongleurs to-night and crave Taranto's royal pardon to-morrow. We must devise somewhat else now."

His cool air revived Marguerite's courage, and she stooped and drew Conrad's sword.

"I can help hold them back, too!" she flashed. But Louis was pondering.

"Ha, love! A plan!" he said swiftly. "I will don his gear, and we will pass out in the dark——"

In two minutes he had unlaced the Wolf's mail shirt, and she, wasting no words, obeyed his gestures and stripped off his black outer-hose and greaves, and then the brassarts and the rest.

"If we can gain our steeds, and the open, we can race for it," said Louis, as she furiously-fast buckled him into the Wolf's cuissarts and laced up the shirt again. In fifteen minutes from the beginning of the whole affair, Louis stood completely ready in the deep visored helm and long black cloak! All had happened so silently that no sound had reached the cortile, for the noise there had covered Conrad's thud on the floor.

"Fortunate that we are of a height," said Louis. "Hallo! Here is his letter of orders in the cloak-pouch! Latin, thank Heaven! 'Return at once to Castel Nuovo, to go on a mission of import. The password is "Manfredo e Benevento."—Andrea, Rex.' Rex! Pluto! Gravest doings are forward if my once humble princely cousin signs himself 'Rex.' But it saves us! Why, Marguerite, I had but hoped to gain our steeds and ride for't, but now we can play the rarest trick on earth! With this password I can take the whole troop into Naples like Conrad himself! Fortunately, he is a silent man. I noted he never spoke to the squire where a sign served. All favours us—dark night, orders already issued by him! I need scarce speak, and as none know what passed in the

sala at supper, they will think you one of the Wolf's usual—adventures. Do you go pay our score to the landlord ; he is too scared to question your going ; and get your mule."

He threw their baggage into its bags as he talked and they lifted the unconscious Wolf on to the bed, and bandaging his mouth lest he should recover ere they were away, covered him with the sheet so as to seem a sleeping traveller to any onlooker.

Marguerite went out among the rapidly arming and mounting men, in the cortile, but none heeded the jongleuresse, and, reassured, she soon saddled the mule and paid the score.

Louis's coolness was infectious, and she resolutely put aside the thought of what awaited them if their trick was discovered by those terrible Huns, whose favourite sport was to bind their prisoners by each limb to four wild steeds and lash them into fury.

Louis strode out boldly now, and found the troop ready mustered in the road. His squire came up.

"The reckoning for this Italian dog, boiar?" he said.

Louis pulled out and threw at him the Wolf's great leather purse.

"Pay him!" he growled, in a fair shot at Conrad's tone. Luckily a visor's depths (especially a deep German helm's) muffle a voice excellently, and the man noted naught amiss. Louis had unbounded audacity, but also, what is ten times more valuable to the adventurer in a corner, caution in all things, and he never underrated a foe's worth. Fortunately, Conrad was accompanied by no other officer that night, for his lieutenant-in-chief, Mikel Vardag, had

found an adventure in Salerno which pleased him, and had stayed to follow it up, meaning to rejoin them next day ; and the under-man, a grim old file-leader, had, of course, stayed with the men, not in the sala. As Conrad had given the orders to march, none asked about waiting for Mikel, unquestioning obedience being practised in the Wolf's pack.

Louis had no more to say, and he leapt into Conrad's great steed's saddle unhaltingly. Marguerite drew up her mule by him. For the squire's benefit he leaned down, and chucked her under-chin with a "Ready, sweetheart?" in broken Italian like Conrad's.

"Ay, lord," turning up a cheerful face in the torch-light.

The men saw unsurprised, as it was habit with both them and their leaders to find such amusements on the march, only the damsels were usually unwilling, and had to be thrown across-saddle Tartar fashion, and rent night's veil by screams.

"Forward, all!" quoth Louis in Hungarian ; and the troop set off in the darkness towards Naples, its leader racking his brains to find a further plan of escape. He knew that the danger was over if he could reach Naples undiscovered thus, but once there it meant revealing his identity to the officer on watch at the gates, and proving it by the signet of Taranto which hung round his neck under his tunic, and therefore the failure of his masquerade. He hated to have his plans baffled, and thought deeply. He had naturally no recollection of the road to Naples, but to his joy two scouts with lanterns on their lances rode ahead of the troop, and if he followed them all was well.

“Gallop,” he said; and they plunged forward; but Conrad’s horse, discovering the difference in the rider, reared. But the horse was not foaled which could throw Louis of Taranto, and finding it could not unseat him it bolted like the wind; then knew him master, and settled into a steady gallop, and the troop caught him up. They walked again, and he ordered the squire: “Fall behind, away!” and Marguerite rode by her brother.

“All goes well so far?” she panted quickly. “But I am yet fearful.”

“Courage, darling! If we reach Naples, we are safe; but even so, I do not wish to betray our names and jest. With luck we may pass into the Porta Capuana, then I will calmly tell the men to ride on to Castel Nuovo. They will think it is to leave you in some house I stop. Then we will dash for’t, and get lost in the city’s warren of lanes. A mad venture, but the only one. In some empty church sacristy we could change our clothes, and leave the mail, and to-morrow—no one of the troop will know the two jongleurs, as none save the squires have seen you unhooded or me close. Reach up and kiss my hand—they are watching us now.”

The night was wearing, but they would reach the gates ere dawn.

Already the sea was nearer, and the road ran along the shore after they passed Castellamare, and came to the long low shore that stretches between Naples and Pompeii, then still buried in the ashes of that last awful eruption of towering Vesuvius, whence even now rose faint smoke-puffs and the thin little line of fire just visible in the darkness.

Already farms and villas were frequent along the

way, and watch-dogs' barks followed the train's passing.

They rode the last mile at a hand gallop, and just as the dusk began to fade from the east behind the masses of Vesuvius and Somna, the Capuana Gate, with its two heavy yellowish towers, loomed out of the dimness ahead.

They drew rein under the parley-grate, and the guard promptly challenged: "Chi va la?" Louis raised his shield, and the light of a powerful lamp shone on its painted wolf.

"Corrado Lupo. 'Manfredo e Benevento'!" he said, clearing his voice and coughing instantly to cover any difference.

"Bene! Passate!" from the grille, and the portcullis creaked aloft. And in rode the false Corrado and his men, clanking, yawning, and slackening wearied horses' reins, no soul of them ever dreaming who sat in their leader's saddle.

The streets of Naples by night were no place for walks abroad, without such escort as they now possessed; for a better picture than a modern scribe may give, the reader is referred to the Decameron, where is the Night-Adventure of Andreassio the Horse-dealer and many another bold roysterer. Watch-fires lit the Larghi, faint lamps the street corners, but off the main road between the Porta and Castel Nuovo was a perfect maze of narrow lanes and alleys, pitch-dark, and hinting at brawls and cul-de-sacs.

Had Marguerite's little figure not swayed wearily in saddle beside him, Louis would have enjoyed the fooling of his foes most keenly, and even so he laughed shortly in the helm's depths.

"Hey, ma mie!" he said to her very low, "we

shall not be stopped now. Come, courage ! Here is a good place ! ”

To the left twisted darkly a narrow Vico, which a sign below a lamp named “ Vico Catania,” and what he judged a church cupola on the sky-line as its goal. He threw up his lance point and with military promptness the hoof-clatter behind stopped. He slipped from steed and told the squire : “ Take the men on slowly. I follow in a moment.”

One man halted there and held his horse and her mule, while he coolly unhooked her bale from its saddle, and putting an arm round her marched quickly down the dim Vico and went sharply round its turn, as the troop moved at a walk along the main road. Out of sight, they broke into a quick run, and dived into another alley-mouth, just seeing “ Vico Medina ” on the sign. Louis halted. “ We must find some shelter quickly now. Yond was not a church, after all. Some one comes—hush-sh.” He drew her into a darker wall-nook, for the dusk lightened every moment now.

A very high house with barred windows faced the Vico, and bolts grated as its narrow, iron-studded door opened and let forth a tall man, who walked rapidly along the way they had come ; by his lantern’s light they saw he wore red hose and shoes, but his cloak hid his face.

From the doorstep gazed after him a tall woman, resplendent in a crimson and gold gown ; the light streaming from the lamp she held high showed her face, beautiful, resolute, and evidently fearless, since she stood thus long at an open door by night. Judging she would not scream needlessly, Louis stepped from covert.

“Madonna, has your house two doors? Could you do a hunted couple the kindness to let them pass out by the other? I will explain if we may come in.”

She did not even start, but turned on him her magnificent black eyes in a smile, as though she found it the most ordinary thing to happen. Her thoughts of her own affairs were so blissful that nothing terrestrial could trouble her just then.

His cloak held his shield, so she saw only a mailed knight of uncertain nationality and a hooded woman.

“Pass in if you are alone,” she said calmly still; and in a moment she had barred the door behind them, hiding them from any pursuit as surely as if the earth had gaped upon them.

She passed a hand over her eyes, and roused herself to ask: “Who are you? who pursues you?”

“We are French jongleurs, madonna, who, at an inn, had the ill-luck to meet a famous condottiero, who fancied my wife here. Wherefore I was forced to tap him gently on the head to occupy his senses for a while. Whereby I dressed in his mail, and led his men some way, without their noting the exchange of leaders. With an excuse to leave them, we got away down these lanes. Now, strangers to Naples, we would ask our way of you to safe lodgings. There briefly is our story.”

She laughed and eyed them approvingly.

“St. Stefan! You did well there! But you will be sought, if he is famous——”

"Not we, madonna. They none of them saw us in our jongleur guise. He told her how, and spying the shield from which the cloak had slipped, she suddenly clapped her hands.

"Aha! 'Twas Conrad the Wolf, then!" she cried, exulting. "How well you served the brute! I am Tzigana born—of Hungary, yet not of Hungarians, and I loathe the Wolf's pack even as you! You are safe with me—I will help you hence after you have rested. You may trust me—by San Zorzio's head!"

She led them upstairs to a splendid room, yet there were no servants astir, and there was somehow an atmosphere of mystery both over her and the house.

Seeing Marguerite curiously eye a silver coffer emblazoned with arms and coronet, she laughed.

"You wonder my name? I am the Comtesse de Garde by my—marriage—and yond was my husband you saw go forth. He will not return till night. Lie down on these couches and rest, pray you! Here is wine and panneforte till the servants come to get you more."

She made to leave them, but Louis stopped her.

"We will only burden your goodness till daylight, madonna, and then if you will add to our debt of gratitude, pray give me a sack so that I may leave this armour in some public place where none may suffer suspicion when it is found."

"Leave it in one of San Gennaro's side-chapels—there none dare tax the priests. Meanwhile, I will guard your wife."

“When more folks are abroad I will go and also seek lodging. Times are good for us of the Gaie Science, and we came hither for the Grand Court d’Amour of Capua. If no harm comes of to-night’s work, I will sing a canzone to your honour there.”

Suddenly she clasped his wrist with quick alarm in the gesture.

“No, no! Pray you not!” she cried urgently. “And tell none you have been with me, nor my name. Some day—soon, I hope—I can explain wherefore; but now silence is the only return I ask for the trifling service I may have done you by opening my door! I do not question you, even when I read your story; it is no concern of mine if a lord and lady choose to play the jongleur! I shall keep your secret—keep mine!”

Louis started, and then laughed. “Are we so ill masked, then?”

Marguerite, revived by the rest and wine, swaggered across the room, thrumming her vielle. “To drink goody! ’Faith, I’d keep a snail before yond lad of yours!” she cried, in such good mimicry of a trudging jongleuresse that they both laughed.

“Do but keep that up, and your disguise is safe!” laughed the Comtesse, as she aided Louis to tie up the mail in a sack she had drawn from under a bale of silks left her by some merchant, to choose from, in a corner.

Donning his own cloak which he had stuffed in Marguerite’s bundle in their hasty flight, he went forth into the Vico Medina, now a-bustle with early-

rising housewives all bound Mercatowards, to fill their daily baskets, ere the sun grew too hot and drove them homewards to their noon siestas. His absence leaves space for some account of Marek, soi-disante Comtesse de Garde.

CHAPTER VI

“Celui qui de tromper les hommes se dispose
Ne trompera pas Dieu dont l'œil voit toute chose.”

NOSTRADAMUS.

SOME while before had dwelt in Naples a strange girl. She was a Tzigana, a gypsy of Lithuania, of the wild steppe-roaming tribe of its plains, and had come to the south as plaything and pastime to Ottokar, Voivode of Lithuania. Her name was Marek—surname she had none, for her position of toy to a Giorgio lord, made her an outcast from her tribe. She was tall, yet so slender that it made her seem less, but when she stood by a tall man he would be amazed to find her eyes so near his own ; eyes large and darkly mysterious as a moorland tarn at dusk, and like her long hands and straight black hair, seeming made for the weaving of spells.

The Voivode tired of her when they had been a short while in Naples, and took in her stead a noted Neapolitan beauty, but Marek, contrary to all the rules of fierce Hungarian passion, whereby she should have promptly knifed her deserter, heeded not at all his dismissal. She was lovely enough to have met better fate, but perhaps the Voivode feared her—perhaps he had the true Magyar's repulsion for the wandering race which her intoxicating fairness had lulled at first—after all, his seasons are immaterial.

Dismiss her he did, however, and Marek went out calmly with the jewels and gold, his gifts, and took her a lodging in Vico Capuana.

Had she not cast eyes upon Count Amaury le Rouge ?

She loved him with all the passion of which a Tzigana is capable, and that is a measure beyond ordinary computation.

Amaury, in a careless despondent hour, fell in with her at a supper party of Enrico Caracciolo's.

Her subtle, feline qualities attracted him, her hidden strengths (because they agreed so well with his own secret-ambitious side), and also, her face was the greatest possible contrast to Jehanne's.

Odd reasons, but then Amaury's mind worked in strange ways ; still at first he had no thoughts beyond a mere dalliance.

Months sped, and Marek took no other lover. Naturally the Voivode's gold melted away, for even a lovely adventuress in a romantic age cannot live without house and board, and she sternly denied all other men, chaste with that absolute chastity of the Bohemian woman when she loves the great love of her life.

When her last jewel was gone, her last hour in the lodging struck. She took her lute under her arm, drew an embroidered veil over her long braided hair after the manner of her people, and uncomplaining went out into the street again—to get her living as she might.

Fate, however, span a queer thread just then.

Count Amaury on his great roan charger clattered across the end of the Vico. He reined up.

“Domna nostra ! Whither go you robed thus, Pearl of the Danube ?”

It had come to her last card and she played it boldly.

“For a last day’s pleasuring, beau sire. To-day I shall sing and dance on the Largi, to-night I shall sleep sound in the blue waters yonder.”

There was no note of regret or self-pity in her even, silken tone. Her eyes fixed on his, had a strange, radiant brightness, as of almost exaltation in her thought. She could not have taken him better, for he would scarce have pitied her had he thought her a self martyr; as it was, she roused his passionate regret that so fair a thing should be lost—and lost she would be, for there was no mistaking her earnestness.

His eyes met hers again—and in that instant he decided his way.

He was once again in a despondent mood with Jehanne—the mood which has seen more falls begin than most others; even fierce rages have not so much to answer for, as this “laissez faire” humour.

Then too—she was but a toy—bah! it was not worth halting over.

He held out his hand and laughed his cheerful, vibrant laugh.

“Sleep sound you shall!” he said, as her long fingers closed round his. “But upon the waters, not below them. To-night I sail for Savoy—sail you with me?”

She would have sailed with him to the world’s end, and unquestioning she mounted up, helped by his turning his foot outwards, for her to step up the tall roan’s side, and nestling in his arm rode to his house to stay till they started for the north.

They had a golden month at Amaury's most inaccessible fortress in the mountains south of St. Jean de Maurienne, "La Garde Joyeuse," and then dispatches called him back to Naples.

But as Naples neared a dread question arose in her mind. "What if he now weary of me?" All the gossip she had heard previously of the young Queen's open favour of her noble lord, came back now, and weighed upon her till she dared a bolder cast—an attempt to keep him in a stronger cage than the silken nets of love such as theirs.

He gave her a gold bracelet set with fine sapphires. "A pretty bond of memory with La Garde Joyeuse," he said.

She dropped on her knees, and her rôle of suppliant became her mightily in his masculine mind, so he answered very tenderly—

"Well, sweetheart?"

"Another gift, my soul! A plain gold ring."

She had chosen her time well—he was in his softest mood, else his smile might have been an amazed frown, but he only raised her, and kissed her lips long and close.

"Why, if you still keep that wish I will do so later, *ma belle*. You would grace the coronet, and you shall hold the baton in the tourneys of Aix, right nobly. Only not now—there are reasons——"

Which there certainly were. First his ambitions, crowned by his thrice daring thought of Jehanne, which would have outweighed the sacrifice of his soul had occasion offered; secondly, he had no intentions of making a mere Tzigana, however fair, Countess of Savoy, though one must do him the justice to say that had it not been for Jehanne, he might have

thought more seriously of it, for Marek had become very pleasant to him by this.

She served him as a relaxation from his irksome state duties, she made him feel his own greatness, she played upon his pity, his love for the weaker thing, and she did it all so well that he gave the smooth answer aforesaid, for he would not have lost her willingly then.

Shrewdly he calculated that so doing gave him a double advantage, for it bound her to him, and time gained was everything in these matters. Sceptic as he was, he believed she would love him at most a few months—a year maybe—so far he thought he knew women of her passionate eastern type, and then she would quietly slide out of his life again.

By that time what might have happened at Court ? If the Neapolitans were down-trodden much longer, what would Prince Andrea's life be worth ?

His lips set very close. He had no scruples over Marek—it was fair enough in his idea. The Voivode had left her, she in her turn would tire of him.

So he replied easily, but she was not satisfied.

“ You palter Amaury—you put me off ! I want my rights now ! ”

“ You shall have them, never fear. But think you a moment. You are Tzigana born, which to the public eye seems as bad as Hungarian. If I appeared with a Hungarian wife, my aims would be suspected by all my Provençal and Neapolitan friends, and my cause with the Court ruined—I should be lost to all fame, if I did so now. Are you mistrustful of my word ? ”

His word ! Poor wretch, if she trusted to that !

“ But a priest at least ? ” she protested.

“ A priest might blab—it would not be very safe, if my foes bribed him.”

“ After all I rate but low, a Giorgio priest—let us have a Tzigana tier of the knot, I know one of my tribe, in Naples.”

Amaury glad to get off so easily promised, and on arrival in the city of his dreams again, Marek found in one of its lanes an ancient druid-like priest of her people, and with many weird performances on his part gave her troth to the Red Count, and felt her soul more at rest.

Amaury, however, minded his oaths, and the Tzigana priest's blessing no more than if they had all been a conjurer's muttered hocus-pocus. They did not bind him by any laws of France or Italy, but for the present Marek was tranquillised, come what might afterwards.

He found her a secluded house in Vico Medina, where she dwelt happy in her hopes and in him, dubbed by him, and the few tradesfolk who served her the Comtesse de Garde, and no one questioned either it or her, for she had the unfathomable reserve of the true gypsy ; and she mixed not at all with her former acquaintances, nor walked the Largi at frequented hours, because of Amaury's cunning argument that sight of her might damage him in the eyes of his Provençal friends.

Of his enemies he sometimes told her, and that Prince Andrea was chief of them since he kept him from his full honours as first Count of the realm. She gathered that his aim was to depose the puppet Prince, and thus with his strong hand sway secretly Jehanne's wrist on her sceptre ; and thus she did

not doubt his relations with the Queen were of state only.

"Thus, *chérie*, thou would'st be ruler of us all," he said to her. "The Queen would rule Naples and the rest, I her, and thou me! Hail Queen Marek!"

And love-blind she believed him!

Meanwhile Louis of Taranto had passed along the narrow streets of tall grey and white houses, whose line was occasionally broken by marble-faced, iron and bronze-gated palazzi, till he climbed the steep rise whereon stands San Gennaro, the great Duomo of Naples, which faces west, and without is banded in black and white marble stripes. Louis quickly pushed back the swinging leather door-curtain, and entered its cool aisles, tall pillared, and many shrined.

Half way up the nave on the left, just before the sacristy door is reached, is a convenient dark little chapel where a Byzantine Madonna smiled her serene eastern smile, and here he halted, and began to pray, waiting a chance to slip down the bundle of mail, unseen of stray passers by.

Presently two men walked slowly from the great door to the sacristy, deep in speech, keeping step by step, waving hand for hand. One was very tall, hatchet faced, an Order on his breast, a splendid ring glittering as he waved his fingers. His biretta bore the knot of an Archbishop, for he was Naples' notoriously pro-Hungarian prelate, Giovanni Orsini of that noble Roman House. His companion formed a sharp contrast, being a little roly-poly of a man with swollen purple cheeks which, moreover, he had a trick of shooting out as if they swelled with windy importance; he wore the plain robe of a cordelier friar, and

yet there was that about his leering eyes, and fiercely sensuous mouth, that made Louis look twice at him as they passed.

His words floated to him, clear in the great church's hush.

"It must soon be ended, Monsignor! I tell you they cannot hold out much more. Aha! Insolent Cleopatra though she be, we shall have her then!"

Louis pricked up his ears, but could not catch Orsini's answer, though he guessed they spoke of the Queen by the word "Cleopatra"; but they turned back at the sacristy door, and walked the nave, so that he caught next this—

"Ludwig should get the letter in two weeks, and then in other two, we can act here."

"Accursed Helen and her beastly crew will tremble then," growled the friar, and they entered the sacristy.

No one else was in sight, so Louis laid the bundle by the altar and strolled from the Duomo, his curiosity rampant. There was so much hate and emphasis in the two men's bearing.

He tossed a small coin to a lame beggar by the door.

"Who was that prelate with the friar anon?"

"Blessings, kind sir! He was the noble Archbishop of Naples, and the friar Prince Andrea's Monk, Robert." He spat violently—the Neapolitan's curse when he dares no more.

Louis nodded, and went thoughtfully down the street, wondering what use to make of his discovery. Meanwhile he entered a hosier's shop on Larga Correggie, and asked for embroidered shirts.

There were two other customers, early as it was, to whom the buxom shop-wife paid much deference. One was a tall dark haired, languid lady in a very rich gold-embroidered deep-blue gown, with no mantle, but a large filmy lace shawl pinned to her jetty braids with golden pins, and a necklace of gold coin, and long eastern ear-rings. The other, a younger girl, had a round little face, and big brown eyes, but the small red mouth had a set which belied the childish ensemble, and did not fit with her alluring smile and dimples. She wore a heliotrope coif netted over with pearls, on her soft, short brown curls, and her gown of the same hue, with a silver girdle and many silver tags and tassels lacing the wide open sleeves and slashings. A quaint blue enamel pendant, heart shaped, and inset with a "J" of brilliants hung round her neck, and the other lady had a similar red one with a "C." They were matching hose by a pattern of silk, and as they argued the shade, the woman sold Louis some shirts and blue sendal hose.

"Good dame, know you of any garnished lodgings kept by honest folks? I am a stranger here——"

"Now that can I!" said the woman cheerfully, with a Provençal accent. "My cousin's wife at Castel Capuana is as worthy a body as you will find by raking Naples with a comb! Her chambers are not dear either."

"Castel Capuana? 'Tis the chief prison, is't not? Look you I cannot afford to lodge with the governor, for I am but a jongleur——"

She smiled at the cunning compliment. "Nay, Pons is but chief jailer, but as his lodging is large he takes guests betimes."

The younger lady listening, looked searchingly at

Louis, and having a keen eye for a proper man, took the chance to strike in—

“Forgive my meddling, Dame Marthe, but an this gentle seeks rooms, an old widow servant of my father’s lives three doors down Vico Carbonara.”

The dark beauty smiled languidly at him through a piece of clear crystal she carried, in a gold mount—an early ancestor of the quizzing-glass, and the supreme mode at Court.

He bowed with a grace almost too finished in a jongleur.

“Many thanks, Madonna, I will——” Here came sudden interruption.

A cat, teased into madness by some wretched urchins, dashed into the shop in a frenzy, and flew into the younger girl’s lap, spitting and clawing. Just as it tore a long strip of her gown, Louis had it by the neck, and with a bound doorwards, threw in into a fountain basin hard by, whence it splashed out, made sane by the chill.

“St. George! How calmly you sat! I nearly fainted, Mabrice!” shuddered the dark lady.

“What! at a cat?” replied she, her lips curling slightly. “Yet you saved me nobly, messire—there is venom in a mad cat’s bite. My most profound thanks!”

“Pray say nought of such a trifle—would I had caught it quicker! The privilege of so doing repays me,” he answered gallantly.

She smiled on him very graciously. “Why not make me a cobla of it, Messire Trovere? Again my thanks, and good-morrow. Good-morrow, Dame Marthe!” They strolled from the shop and along towards Castel Nuovo.

The shop-wife tapped Louis's arm.

"If you are wise, beau chanteur, make her the cobla ! 'Art a favoured man."

"Why so ?" indifferently paying her score.

"Why ? That is Madonna Mabrice di Pace, daughter to Signor Raimondo di Pace, Prince Andrea's high chamberlain, and maid of honour to our blessed Queen Jehanne. She has her right ear in all things, I can tell you ! The other is Countess Ithamar of Argos, lady to Empress Catherine."

"I guessed her Greek by her speech. I will see as to the cobla ; but send me now to your cousin's. Their chambers will be more costly, I fear."

Castel Capuana, otherwise called La Vicaria, stands just inside the Porta Capuana, large, yellow and gloomy. Charles of Anjou used it as his residence while removing from Castel del Ovo to Castel Nuovo, whither he installed him as quickly as possible as Castel Capuana is right amid the mass of noisy dirty Vici, which are the city's heart.

Now its basement was used as the State prisons, but the upper floors were still luxuriously furnished to lodge any foreign visitor's suites which could not be put up in Castel Nuovo.

The boy sent by Dame Marthe led Louis to a small gate in the high wall at the Castel's back, and thumped thereon with a brick.

Instantly it flew independently open, and a howling scullion hurtled out, and made no effort to rise from the kennel where he sat down, among mud and cabbage stalks. The propelling power showed as a very large white-hosed leg, and huge soft fist shaken above it.

"Come in again, imp of Satan, and be put on the

spit ! ” roared a female voice, loud yet not harsh of tone.

“ She ever crows harder than she pecks ! ” said the little boy to Louis.

A large woman filled the doorway, with a flopping bouncing figure, and two large arms akimbo on ample sides, her sturdy feet planted wide apart under a bright blue jupon. Shrewd little pig’s eyes twinkled under jetty bands of hair topped by a smart red coif, and she grinned widely as she saw Louis, her thunderous brow clearing.

“ Hey, Pierrot, mon cœur, who’s this pretty spark ? ” she asked the small boy.

“ I seek lodgings, madame, ” began Louis in French mixed with Provençal.

“ Enter ! Here’s luck ! My other lodger left yest’re’en. A Frenchman, too, this time. No more rascally Tedeschi ! ”

“ Donnerwetter ! Who miscall you, fairest ? ” growled a deep voice behind.

One of her big hands lit with surprising speed on a man’s bearded cheek.

“ You ! ” she said smartly. “ Out of my way, lourdaud ! Monsieur, this is another tenant, a scamp-at-arms, one Capitaine Barberoux—I forget his outlandish German name. Why he bides I know not, for Pons looks like a long liver ! Now stop chattering and come within. ”

No one had talked but herself, and the big German wagged a humorous red-haired jaw silently at Louis, as she led him within.

There was an inner courtyard, with a vine trellis across one end, a fountain in the centre, green grass in the corners, and fig-trees trained up the walls ;

round the yard the rooms opened, but they seemed the dame's own, for one was evidently the kitchen, with huge fire-place, where now in the heat burned only a small charcoal braiser. But up a short flight of steps with wooden balconies, looking on to the yard, were two others, both with clean red tiled floors, white-wood furniture and gaudy pictures of saints and impossible animals on the whitewashed walls.

Jolly Dame Blanchdine proudly pointed to them: "A young artist of Florence painted them for his rent," she said. "Ah! He was a merry lad! He painted a fly in the *Sieur des Baux's* glass, in the hall here, and 'twas so real that he flung the goblet at the servers' heads when he could not fish it out! Bright hues, are they not? I count not paint wishy-washy pictures, I!"

"I like your rooms and price, dame. Tell your man I will be back with my wife in an hour," said Louis as they went down again.

"My man! Ho! ho! His will is mine—Pierrot, there are cakes on the table!" she told the boy. "Hither, Pons! I have a new tenant!"

From a passage-way hopped a little thin, grey-haired man, with head inclined on one side, like a meditative sparrow. He carried many keys.

"Eh? Why get you ever such cursed good-looking ones?" he chirped.

"What's to you? Get hence, jealous ape! Were it not for me you would yet port wood in *Mondragon* market-place! You only understand Government-lodgers!"

He grinned, and went into the kitchen, and his redoubtable wife smiled at Louis. "He is disobed-

ient at times, but well spoken on the whole," she said reflectively.

"I see who keeps Castel Capuana's keys!" laughed he as she let him out into the street.

"Why, certes," replied that person proudly smoothing her tablier. "Might is right here, messire!"

Louis went to fetch Marguerite.

CHAPTER VII

GIDDY Enrico Caracciolo was possessed with an idea and thus :

He stood in the tiltyard at Castel Nuovo, watching a friendly lance-bout between Pierre de Lascaris and Foulquet le Courtois, wherein the latter's steed, swerving on a weak fetlock caused his rider to catch de Lascaris's lance full on the gorget, and topple promptly into the loose sand.

Erminetta di Arcusa, Mabrice di Pace, Hypollyta Sanseverini, and a dozen other gay maidens and their gallants were also onlookers ; and when Pierre and Foulquet clasped hands and inquired for bruises, Erminetta tossed a disdainful head as the pair neared her.

"Light straws blow easily before their own Provençal mistral !" she remarked, apparently to Enrico.

Foulquet, courteous even then, answered only : "It is but natural that she who has never tasted defeat in her own fields of Charm and Fairness, should be unable to pity the vanquished."

Whereat Erminetta could think of no better reply than : "I am sure I could joust better than a straw puppet myself !"

Her petulant speech it was which inspired Enrico—and it promised to lower that proud damsel's pride, he thought gleefully.

“Ha, lords ! Madonna here is warlike ! Will no other fair one take up her glove and uphold the Comte du Bar’s honour ? In the stables neigh two dainty Andalusian mules new brought from Spain—there is a secluded lawn beyond the grove there——”

With delighted cries the giddy band greeted his idea, and in a few minutes they had carried it out, and dragged off protesting Erminetta to the lawn with gleeful anticipation. It did not take long to trot the two graceful white mules from stall, nor to fetch two small helms and breast plates from the armoury, with blunted lances and small tilt shields ; and once the group assembled on the smooth sward, Enrico, having snatched a beflagged trumpet as he came from the armoury, stood on a bench, and amid laughs, cheers, and japes proclaimed :

“Whereas the honour of Foulquet, Comte du Bar, having been impeached by the Lady Erminetta di Arcusa, he cries to the four quarters for a true lady to uphold his cause in the name of our true Sovereign Venus, and her Vice-reine Queen Jehanne of Naples !”

But Erminetta determined to see the jest through, once her spirit aroused. “Wait till I go don a short jupon,” she cried gaily. “Find a championess by my return !”

“I will lift the glove,” said Mabrice, stroking one pretty mule’s nose. She, too, ran within, and just here Jehanne came out of the Castel, and, strolling over the grass, learned what was a-foot from a dozen gay tongues.

She was wearied out by a tiresome hour with Marzano, and a tableful of dry state papers, and she smiled at the diversion as Guy and Enrico dragged up

a bench, and installed her thereon, with a great long-stemmed lily for a baton, and Ligorio Caracciolo in a trice twisted her a diadem of roses.

Here Amaury, following her, saw what was going on, and very prudently went back to find the captain of the guard, whom he bade post a dozen sentries across the grove and lawn, and let none but the two girls pass. He did not wish a repetition of the monk's spyings if thus he could prevent it. But Boccaccio meeting Mabrice, and seeing the nearest sentry stoop to tighten a spur-leather, took a run-jump and leap-frogged over him, with a yell of joy, as he joined the tourney-party on the lawn.

The two girls came back, dressed in short jupons, and hose and high boots borrowed from the nearest men's squires; Erminetta in dark green, Mabrice in red with a gold scarf, delicately hinting at the du Bar colours. Quickly they were squired by eager young hands, buckled into plate and helms, and helped into the mule's saddles, and with daintiest burlesque of the real tilt, led to the list-edges. Enrico turned to sound the Proclamation, and *Laissez Allez*, only to find the lovely Cecile des Baux had stolen his trumpet, and despite his snatches, skipped off blowing discordant toots, culminating in such a weird blast that Mabrice's lively mount gave one bound and headed for the groves through a rose-bed.

Bucking and jumping it was led back, Mabrice sticking on gamely, but shaking with laughter; and by the time Jehanne could check her own mirth its fright had infected Erminetta's. Both danced round on the lawn like two gambolling lambs, till it was only with the greatest difficulty that the two tilters kept their saddles.

When the mules were stilled by two youths hanging on to the bridles of each, Jehanne waved the lily.

“Let us omit the trumpet!” she said. “Valiant maids, do your duty. *Laissez Allez!*” and with the short heralding, the squires let go.

The two mules, trained well enough to jog quietly in a procession or chase, did not understand being ridden furiously head-first at each other, and though they charged forward splendidly, just as their riders’ lowered lances would have met, they halted short like two wooden toys, their noses almost touching, their wilful fore-hoofs dug into the ground right firmly; and, as if they had been two dolls worked by the same string, both girls shot over their heads and rolled at Jehanne’s feet.

“Hey! We are not hurt!” they cried with one breath, as the field rushed to pick them up. “Bring us fit steeds and I will fight the world!” shrilled Erminetta, her blood up.

“Ha, fairest!” from Foulquet gleefully now. “Even straw puppets can teach you that the best steed may stumble!”

Two Arab jennets belonging to Guy and Enrico were sent for, and the tilt went on.

“They handle their lances like clubs!” said Amaury, as they missed each clean at the first charge. “Ha, better! Mabrice has Erminetta on the *bras-sart*! She reels—no!—ho! ho! She hits Erminetta on the helm with the pole! Lay on, fair kittens! Tooth and claw! Saw one ever the like?”

The fun grew furious as the two girls, heating to work, missed with the points, and laid on with the poles. Erminetta’s steed, smarting from a thump on

the quarters, grew unruly, and Jehanne threw down the lily. She sprang up, excitement wild in her eyes.

"Ye are a couple of washwives!" she cried. "Thumping one another like linen on stones! I myself challenge the world! Find me a champion, and I will meet her! Run, Guy, and bring me—not Eblis, he is too fiery—but grey Merlin, and bay Grana for the other."

She ran off, deer-like, swift towards the Castel, to don her gear.

"San Donato!" said Giovanni Boccaccio to the group. "What will hap if this joust is blown abroad? Who is going to raise her glove?"

"I!" said Erminetta. "I will not use shaft if she wills point—I grew too heated."

In a very short time Jehanne came back, followed by Guy and the horses, accepted Erminetta's challenge and the sport began anew.

Amaury watched with keen delight as she vaulted into saddle agile as any boy, and took the gay lance from Guy. Could any but she ride thus in this scrambling joust, and keep their dignity so? The others had seemed just what they were, awkward girls clad as boys thwacking each other with poles, but in Jehanne one saw Brunhilde the Valkyria—Galahad the Maiden Knight.

At the first rush she caught Erminetta's shield fair and square, but the latter's lance striking the shoulder joint of Jehanne's brassart, they both sat firm in saddle, and drew apart again, equal still.

Suddenly, as Jehanne waited by Guy her squire, there came shouts from afar near Bibirella Tower—shouts and running men. Then towards the gay

tourney party charged a dark mass of shaggy hair—a fierce Calabrian wolf escaped from the dens, hunger-mad, and eager for battle.

Straight as an arrow it rushed on. Erminetta on her steed was nearest in its path, and with one spring it was upon the horse's haunches, biting deep, and hanging on like a burr. She, unarmed save for her lance, could neither control the steed nor slip off, but ere any of the men present could draw swords or come near the kicking frantic beast, Jehanne had snatched a sharpened lance from Guy (which by great good luck he had brought in mistake with the blunted ones) and charged straight at the wolf. Like any boar spearer she got her weapon in the shoulder, and as the beast fell off the steed, she pinned it to the ground.

Then only did she cry clearly "Aide ! aide ! Anjou !" as if she had been in a charge. By then a dozen blades were buried in the wolf's body, and Erminetta was lifted from saddle by as many eager hands.

"Eh Domeniddio !" cried Boccaccio, "I shall sing of you no more as Light, but as Lightning of the World !"

But Jehanne laughed aloud, for the Head Keeper, poor wretch, afraid for his life at such ill-keeping of charge, threw himself face downwards on the sward before her, crawling as a dog, imploring mercy, while he might, of the Queen herself. His terror was comical, and she pitied him.

"You have given us rare sport this time, good knave—but keep the bars better henceforth. So, I pardon thee !" she said.

The hubbub of exclamations and cheers had a new stimulus, for Erminetta here took the occasion to

faint, and in the fuss of bearing her to her rooms in the Castel, the tourney ended.

Jehanne, walking in the rear towards the house, found Amaury at her elbow.

“Ho Majesty! Who feared how she would front her foes? O Zenobia of Naples, fear nothing! I would all the city could have seen your deed—they would follow you to hell, after such valiance!” he said in a tone, low yet singing with exultation. She smiled very graciously in his eager face.

“You mistake—’twas quite a joy to charge an open earthly foe: I have plenty of mortal courage, but the strength to face weary care, oppression, disgrace—that is what I lack.”

“Whether you lack it or not, Naples trusts in you—as do I!” very low. The glamour his martial spirit held for her spoke in his favour, and she answered his look with one which fanned the flame no little; then as she looked up she beheld Andrea and the friar reading together at a window in his tower. Whimsical smiles wreathed her lips.

“There sits *one* pair of readers!” she said gaily. “Go get a book, and read to me, i’ the Long Sala. I, too, must have a schoolmaster.”

And in the sunny day Queen Jehanne sat cheerfully listening to the Red Count’s skilful reading for an hour and more.

CHAPTER VIII

COUNT AMAURY's Neapolitan residence was but a narrow house on Larga Carbonara, manned with a meagre staff (as lordly trains then went) of fifteen picked men, all Savoyards, as loyal as any vassals could be, but the Red Count disdained the jests of his giddy friends such as Enrico, and laughed at their inquiries as to if he had swept his own room out, or bedded his horses of an evening. He had a round score of houses, beginning with the magnificent Palace of Aix, and ending with a hunting chalet in the Alpes Maritimes ; but in Naples he held too large a household folly, as well he might, seeing that rarely a month passed without some notable being poisoned or knifed by some retainer. So both he and Bertrand des Baux were partial to eating at home oftener than at Castel Nuovo, and mocked all critics lightly.

One night a week after Louis di Taranto's arrival in Naples, any one standing on the opposite height of San Giovanni Carbonara's church-steps, might have looked into the Count of Savoy's second-floor windows, and beheld him sitting fanning himself with a palm-leaf, for the heat was appalling even for a Neapolitan August.

He wore a thin red silk robe, his feet thrust into open sandals, and his long chestnut hair was tied back from his neck by a riband, which rather feminine

effect was more than neutralized by manly visage and bare muscular arms.

His body-servant Pierrot, a grim, wizened old fellow from Embrun des Alpes, announced the *Sieur Bertrand des Baux*.

The Grand Justicer's usually impassive face was agitated his hair awry.

"What news?" asked Amaury, as Pierrot vanished.

Bertrand, as if the heat stifled him, tore off his *bliaut* of green silk and turned up his white muslin shirt sleeves. Then he swore with an earnestness which made his lounging host sit up and prop elbows on table to listen.

"Just as I lay down for my siesta after noon, Guy de Montleon came to me with a fine tale! I always thought him no fool, silly as he seems at times. He was asleep behind a thick bush in the Castel gardens, when Nicholas of Transylvania, the Ban of Croatia and Giovanni Orsini came and sat on the bench in front of it. Guy woke, and heard, for luckily they spoke Italian for Orsini's sake, thus:

" 'You think it likely then?' from Orsini.

" 'Yes,' quoth Nicholas. 'I had a private letter on the same day as the Queen's, and King Ludwig assures me he will not halt in the matter.'

"Then the Ban took up the tale: 'Wherein he saith that directly he gets her refusal as to the coronation, he will follow up his threat. The Pope also will not refuse his demands, and he will send a Legate to be ready for it. I will stake half my lands that one is even now at Pisa!'

" 'What then? Will Ludwig come hither himself?' asked Orsini.

" 'He will leave post haste, with eight thousand

men and as many more to follow as needful, and march straight hither. He means no more parleying folly,' says the Ban. 'He was so sure the Queen would refuse his demands that he was planning the campaign even as he wrote. Oh, he makes no mistakes, our Ludwig! Thus is he great.'

"Then spoke Nicholas: 'But there were rumours that Zara on the Dalmatian coast was in rebellion. If so, Ludwig will go himself to subdue it—probable, since he would be some days' ride nearer Naples than Buda. We may have the ultimate cartel here any day now—the Pope's heart can never hold out about his share in't!'

" 'Who could? A hundred thousand florini of good Magyar gold!' chuckled Orsini, and Nicholas went on:

" 'Not our holy Clement, certes! We shall have that mandate here in another ten days! Aya! I am to be Grand Seneschal of Naples then! I must seek for another mansion! How would yon insolent Caracciolo's palazzo serve?' They all laughed together, and walked away. Guy, certes, lost no time in seeking me. The lad was half crazed with rage—even as I am.—Ciel! Our time is as short as a cheap mass!" He sprang up and paced the room.

"St. Trophime of Arles!" cried Amaury, choking with excitement. "Hell! The Pope bribed, the kingdom to be seized! I can scarce grasp it all! Eh, Bertrand! We are in a nice pass now! Lucifer! That is why the infernal Andrea grinned so, when the latter was read—why he vapoured and threatened us! Oh, but we should have been well tricked had we not found out! Now—Pardie!—something must be done—and quickly! Let me think." He flung

himself on an eastern divan, and leaned from the lattice as if for cooler air. Bertrand stopped his pacing and sat down near.

The crushing revelation had set them as near panic as two such men could ever be. Rage and hatred blazed sky-high with both.

From Amaury's wild wheel of thought came a bright spark—Jehanne !

"We must act !" said Bertrand in a perfect growl. "But we have no time—yet we must think it well out. We alone know—for Guy is dumb."

"He may be useful now," said Amaury, hearing his own words dimly. Then his full reason rallied, and he clenched his fist savagely.

"Accursed Huns ! But we'll set them a-swing yet !" His low tone would have been a fierce shout had he not remembered that every wall had ears. "Yet—no use to curse either ! We must act !"

Bertrand leaned across the table, his straight black brows met in a frown, but his mouth open in an odd half grin.

"Princes often die—of fevers," he said. Something in his cool suggestion made Amaury, unscrupulous as he was, start.

"Yes—yes," he assented. "But there are a lot of damned physicians among us nowadays, who seek causes very closely—so do the tasters. Think of somewhat better, man ! 'Tis an ugly idea."

"A challenge to a duel ?"

Amaury laughed in contempt. "Bah ! He would not fight with straws ! And 'twould be awkward enow, for whoever did it—sheer murder with a weak fool, like him !"

Bertrand's grin widened horribly. "Bene ! But

what else, pray, are we—ah—suggesting ? ” he asked.

“ It seems to me,” said Amaury very slowly, “ that this affair needs different treatment from the average—suggestion. The more folk mixed up in’t, the better for us, at the inquiry. There ever is an inquiry. Blame the minors—and save the chiefs ! ” Bertrand nodded.

“ In an ordinary case a large circle would betray us,” pursued Savoy. “ But here the object is so well hated that all we shall admit will help as in a Crusade. Top of our list comes the Empress——”

“ Next my cousin Raimond, and Hughes,” cut in des Baux.

“ Geoffroy Marzano, Roger Sanseverino, the Montolieu brothers, the two Caraccioli, Pierre de Lascaris, the two Artois, Charles and Beltramo, Cabano Filippa—who will bring Sancia, whose lover is the Count of Terlice—an old villain but a useful. Even with these we can do’t ! ”

“ I am dim on the plan itself. Why not give out Andrea is mad and clap him in a lone fort somewhere ? ”

“ Mad ! ” scornfully. “ Why, how would Nicholas, Croatia, and crafty Friar Robert contradict us ? No ! Such as he are best safe ! ”

He was cool and decided now as a dealer of cards, and his hands were as steady as he played with a pen on the table.

Bertrand eyed him very keenly and took his risk. He leaned over and said in his ear—

“ I know why ! ”

“ Mordie ! Why ? ” catching his hand in a trap-firm clutch.

"Because of Her," said Bertrand, every word weighty as lead.

He was the boldest man in Naples, but as he met his friend's eyes he started and crossed himself of sheer habit. To call their blaze fury is but weak phrasing—it was the uncontrolled rage of a man suddenly touched upon the raw of his life's most dear and fiercest desire.

The Grand Justicer shuddered like one of his own prisoner-victims.

"I shall not lie to you now!" said Amaury between his teeth. "For if I thought you would betray this, I would kill you straight; but you will not because you dare not! You rise or fall with me! So be it! Now you have guessed my end. Eh, why not? Is there any other but me in the field? No. And if there were, I would kill him too!"

"Be easy. You know I am safe. St. Honorat! Why should I betray you—my oldest friend? Stop glaring at me, Amaury! Is She to know aught?"

"No! Decidedly no! She would never consent. Bertrand, she thinks my devotion disinterested. We are but on the threshold of love—she thinks! Judge if my way is wary—time enough after. Enough! Think you young Guy will stand firm in the coming hurly."

"Leave him to me," said Bertrand with another grin. "He aspires, so far hopelessly, to my pretty niece, Hugues's youngest, Cecile Passe-Rose. If I promise her to him, he would descend gleefully to the inferno! All the De Montleons are thus—hot fighters or lovers—risk-alls for their desires. Oh, we have Guy there!" snapping finger and thumb together.

Amaury mused awhile ere he spoke, and then rapidly went on thus : " To-morrow night by good fate is the masque for Duchess Agnes's birthday. I will warn Marzano, and do you tell the Empress to tell all those I have named to meet us secretly during the ball, below the terrace at eleven. In our masks it is the easier. Folly to plot within walls when the sea is open to us. We will have a felucca there by the gardens, and as the Montolieus of Marseilles, De Lascaris and Marzano are coast-bred all, we will sail it ourselves, so that none but our circle are aboard to betray it. A few hundred yards from shore, and we are safe. Thus we will hold our every conference on it."

" Can we all get aboard ? "

" Leave out the Caraccioli and Terlice then, and Sancia. They can be told after."

" Will Marzano agree to—violence ? A conscientious old dog——"

" He can be persuaded 'tis for the kingdom's good. Every man has a soft spot. Pitch on that and rub hard—so you may do any thing ! Sound advice."

" Amaury," said Bertrand falteringly, " when thou'rt King——"

" Sh—too soon ! When it is over we can talk on't. But be sure I will reward openly."

Bertrand scowled heavily. " No harm talking ! I covet my cousin Hugues' office."

Amaury whistled low. " Whew ! Seneschal of Provence ! Ciel, you fly very high, Bertrand."

" What of you ? " very tersely.

Amaury's brow cleared, and he took his confederate's hand in friendly grip.

" Right ! Agreed ! I will make Hugues a Prince

of Naples instead ; he might have the Duchy of Salerno—time enow to settle that.”

But Bertrand with much innate Provençal guile hid the higher aim he had, till his hour was ripe.

“ No more can be done till we have all met to-morrow. Thus good-night ! I am going as a Druid priest to the masque.”

“ And I as a Roman senator. The Queen goes as Diana, and I am her devotee. Mabrice told me her dress.”

“ Eh ! It fits oddly with to-night’s news ! ” chuckled Bertrand. “ A Roman senator slew Julius Cæsar ! Good-night, my Brutus ! ”

And Des Baux left the Lord of Savoy to his ambitious dreams.

Next night in Castel Nuovo Queen Jehanne stood before her long mirror, which was turned to a sheet of light by its brilliant side lamps and many thick candles above and on the walls, and surveyed her glorious image with critical satisfaction. She was robed as Diana, but not as the short-skirted Huntress ; as silver-crowned Selene the imperial Moon, and the long filmy Greek gown was caught up below the heart by cross-bands of silver stars. Her splendid hair was twisted in a Greek knot behind, but it was so long and thick that Filippa had been obliged to take a great tress round her head which formed a golden frame for the diadem of a large silver crescent which crowned her brow. A silver tissue veil flowed from the crescent’s horns over her shoulders behind.

She had followed Greek ideals entirely, so that her lovely arms were bare to the shoulders, of which the right was left undraped, and her slim feet had no other covering than the silver sandal straps.

A thin chain of great diamonds round her throat was her only other jewelry.

As Filippa handed her a silver pin to adjust the coronet, a knock came at the outer room's door, and Mabrice opened to Boccaccio.

"Enter!" called Jehanne, hearing the voice. "I am ready, 'Ser Nino! Behold your work!"

He had sketched her the whole costume from a statue of the goddess he had seen in Rome, and they had disputed the head-gear together; so he came anxiously to see it. He was disguised as Homer, and held a tortoise-shell lyre in one brown hand, and as he entered promptly fell on one knee in merry adoration.

"Hail, Immortal! Helen shall fly from Troy in utter jealousy! 'Tis perfect, most perfect—yet—yea, that right-side curl falls too far forward over your pink ear's shell. A pin, Sancia!"

"Where?" cried Jehanne, twisting about before the glass. "I cannot see—pray alter it, 'Ser Nino!"

The artist in matters classical lifted the rebel curl flowing from the knot behind, but even as his nimble fingers arranged it hasty steps sounded in the ante-room, and without ceremony Prince Andrea and Friar Robert entered. The group by the mirror stood stiff as so many puppets, and Jehanne's lips parted in blank amazement.

The vision of delight she made would have disarmed any but them, yet the Prince was obviously in evil mood. She wondered if he were sober.

"What means this?" he blustered. "Did I not desire you to check this vain mumming? You cannot be seen in this shameless gear——"

His voice melted her amazement; Boccaccio noted that her lips set firmly and she half closed her eyes ere

she answered—a trick she had when strongly moved, either by wrath or joy.

“What is amiss with it?”

“Amiss? Oh, modesty! Your shoulders—your bosom—your feet——”

Then his gaze fell on Giovanni. “Ha, mountebank! How dare you be in our Consort’s chamber? Hence!”

“How dare you enter it, either—unasked?” flashed Jehanne violently, more spurred by the insult to her friend than to herself. “Our Consort! But I am my Consort’s Sovereign! Ask my pardon and then depart—or I call the guard!”

Friar Robert and his pupil looked as though a bombard had suddenly exploded before them. Here was change with a vengeance. The Queen’s calm dignity was bad enough, but this raging regality was worse.

Andrea weakened visibly.

“You cannot go to this folly robed so,” he grumbled.

Calmly she thrust another pin through the coronet and draped the veil.

“Wherefore not? My gown is at least clean and decent”—waving a finger at him. Upon his bliaut breast was a large wine stain, and on his sleeve grease of gravy. Not for naught had de Lascaris called him Prince Sloven. He swore, but Jehanne only took a great ostrich fan from Filippa and prepared to quit the room. Andrea flung himself before the door.

“You must don another robe!” he vapoured.

Jehanne’s brows drew together, and—before she could act came interruption. The inwards-opening door threw the Prince forward with an undignified

little run, and only the friar's ready clasp saved him from a tumble.

Empress Catherine, gorgeous beyond conception as the Queen of Sheba, a walking mass of gold-cloth, jewels, peacocks' feathers on head and in fan, fluttering with gold tissue veils, sailed in and made playful reverence to the angry Goddess.

"Get your mask, dearest!" she cried, ignoring Andrea entirely. "The music begins. Am I not well disguised? Ah—yes, pull your veil so as to hide your hair a little more. So you may pass for Marie——"

"I forbid this madness!" growled Andrea, non-plussed, his brief dash of courage smouldering out before the imperial reinforcement.

"What? The masque? Pity you kept silence till it was astir!" said the Empress, coolly fixing him with her crystal spy-glass.

"I knew there was to be one such folly, but I told Jehanne not to go thereto——" The friar grinned, and Catherine felt a most urgent desire to give him a sound rap on the head with her long fan hilt, but of course suppressed this unroyal longing.

Jehanne put on her silver tissue half-mask, with its fall of delicate silver lace, and turned to go. Her silent contempt fired Andrea again, and perhaps it was the extra irritation of addressing a masked person which made him lose caution and spurt:

"Make the most on't! Eh! It may be your last——"

Quick as a juggler the friar clapped a silencing hand on his royal dupe's mouth, and twisted him outside the door, leaving the aunt and niece gazing wonder-stricken at each other; and discreet Giovanni

slipped after the others, seeing the trembling of Jehanne's hand.

Catherine kissed her, as she sank a moment on an ivory chair. "O, the wretch! Courage, chérie! Heed him not! What said he erst?"

Jehanne explained. "Aunt, what can I do?" she ended. "If this is beginning of his authority as my husband, where is end thereof? I threatened—yet after the Council of late, what would hap an I did? Open riot. Yet I would have done it had you not come. I will not brook his insults!"

"Do we of Anjou ever need, long?" asked Catherine significantly. "What meant he about 'last times'? It may very well be his! Now no more! Come down. I hear the trumpets! Giovanni is without in the corridor."

Jehanne went out, but Catherine, lingering to untangle a heel from her train in the anteroom, whispered to Filippa and Sancia (Mabrice having followed Jehanne): "Come with me to meet the Count of Savoy by the terrace at eleven! in your masks, and answer no one who does not answer 'Venezia,' when you challenge them with 'Pavia!'" and they nodded understandingly.

The scene in the Baron's Hall was gorgeous beyond description, ablaze with lights, colours, and jewels, a-thrill with music and laughter, as the dances sped.

The masque opened with Duchess Agnes, a silver tissue domino completely hiding her splendid dress of an Etruscan queen, standing on the dais and pelting the crowd with roses, which were to be exchanged at midnight for valuable gifts by the lucky catchers.

Then with a single trumpet-blast, a splendid herald in rose and gold tabard parted the throng, by waved

hand, and twelve graceful boys and girls in golden dresses danced in, symbolic of the Months of the Duchess's coming year. They were followed by twenty-four smaller Hours, children in pale rose hue, garlanded with roses. After a graceful dance before her, they laid at her feet caskets containing her friends' birthday gifts, and retired amid storms of applause.

In the confusion of the next dance Jehanne stood in the reception chamber, near one of its long windows giving on to the terrace, when a Roman in ivory silk toga and golden head fillet accosted her.

"Ave Diana!"

"Ah, Count Amaury! But I am wearied of dancing—walk we a little." Enchanted at this, he ventured more.

"Upon the terrace, an you please, Majesty?" She took his arm, and silently they passed out.

She was still simmering with her pent rage at Andrea's conduct, and of a mind for confidences. In ten minutes Amaury had drawn the story from her, and pressed her hand for sympathy—unresented.

"I could have struck him!" she ended hotly.

Amaury laughed very low. "Courage! It is darkest just ere dawn."

She pulled him up impetuously beneath the lamp at the terrace end, and deftly drew off his mask. It was a childish action, but served her turn.

"Why do you all say 'Courage' thus? The Empress said it anon. It means deeper. Out with it, comrade! What is it the wind?"

Amaury took her other hand and looked close into her eyes.

"You think rightly, but you must trust me without

asking more just now. I am under vow to silence as yet. In good time you shall be freed. Trust me, my Queen."

"Freed?" she flashed, letting go his hands.

"Steady. Marzano hath a long head. Enough, dearest friend. It is safest to speak no more of it."

Ere replacing his mask he sought her with a look, long and with the least shade of deeper tenderness therein. In the lamps' soft light, the Red Count was a very gallant figure, a strong man in his strength, and her mood was yielding. For the moment she wondered how it would be to have his arms about her, sure shield from any foe—and then a trifle shamed she was glad the mask hid her blush.

As quickly her longing for gaiety, for relief of her thoughts of Andrea, came back, and she held out her arms to him as the music, clearly audible through the open windows, began a fresh dance.

"Dance we down the terrace—there is no crowd, and we hear well!" she said.

He clasped her, and they whirled away together, separating and holding hands apart, as the lavolta-steps bid them the shortest spaces possible.

Neither spoke, yet each understood the magic of night and scene which was drawing them closer, and at the last round steps together, she leaned upon him, and he held her nearer than ever he had dared before—and she said nothing.

"If I stay here longer, she will break my caution," thought he silently; then, as if she had read his thought, she paused by the nearest window.

"I promised Giovanni the next pavane," she said and they went in.

Light was dawning upon the Red Count's feeling,

yet at the glimmer she was still uncertain, and, if anything, glad. Temptation to bind a man to her even by friendship which might drift deeper, was very strong for one so alone and weary as she; and if opportunity makes thieves, how much more lovers?

Amaury surrendered her happily to Boccaccio and went off thrilling inwardly to his fateful meeting at eleven, when by ones and twos, a fantastic little band came cautiously after him to the garden molo, where lay ready in the lapping waves a large felucca.

Swiftly they put off into the indigo night.

CHAPTER IX

“ Si prisonier ne diet poiut sa raison
Sans un grand trouble e douloureux soupson
Pour son confort qu'il s'y fasse une chanson ! ”

Sirvente of Richard Cœur-de-Lion.

THE Princess Marguerite of Taranto, in her guise of Rita, wife to Messer Vivien de Chartres, a jongleur-esse, sat in the courtyard of Castel Capuana on the edge of the fountain, and sang gaily to her vielle, in the absence of her supposed husband at the barber's.

She sat in the warm sunlight and watched the white doves wheel and alight to drink the clear waters. She had a heart as light as any white flutterer of them all, rejoicing in her freedom and the frolic of acting her rôle. They had told the worthy Dame that they came from a village outside Chartres, and (to account for Marguerite's occasional lapses into too high gentility) that she was an orphan of good family with whom Louis, the gay trovere, had eloped from her convent school, at the age of fifteen ; and her curiosity thus satisfied, the good woman questioned no further.

There was much coming and going in the courtyard : soldiers with orders, scullions, lower jailors with keys and food-trays for the prisoners, workmen with tools, two bright-robed contadini with Dame Blanchine's utter and eggs, one with a little brown baby strapped on her ample back, in Vesuvian fashion—even

a priest came by, hastily fetched to some dying unfortunate. Then, in sharp contrast to these came a smart esquire in a strawberry hued suit, from the Governor, to tell Pons to report a certain prisoner's behaviour. All these Dame Blanchine interviewed quite as much as her husband; indeed, she had not a few keys in her wide apron pockets, for her boast to Louis was no idle one. She sat now by Marguerite mending Pons's festa tunic, and her tongue wagging like a bell-clapper.

Presently a tall, slender youth appeared, and walking with quiet lagging step to the Dame's broom, took it up and began to sweep the yard with long, rhythmic strokes. He wore a coarse brown suit, with neither pouch nor dagger on the belt, and wooden shoes on his finely-shaped feet, yet the clear-cut, dark face, the poise of proud head on straight shoulders, the careful combing of the dark hair, and the clean white hands, all said "noble" loudly. Marguerite eyed him with interest.

His eyes were very sad, yet as he caught sight of the pretty picture of the girl upon the marble fountain edge, holding her hand out to a whirling dove, his finely-cut lips parted in an involuntary smile of pure artistic pleasure. And as their eyes met she had a sudden foolish wish for her favourite gown of silver brocade and her own golden hair daintily dressed, instead of her dusky curls and gay red jupon.

As he swept she saw that on each wrist he had a polished steel bangle linked to the other by a small chain about a yard long. Sudden pity struck her as the seamy side of the prison was thus suddenly brought near, and as she looked another man, clad in a strange black suit, holding in one hand a

crimson half-mask, hurried down the opposite passage leading to the Hall of Justice. Marguerite turned with relief to the Dame's jolly warm ear-to-ear grin.

The youth laid down his broom and spoke to the Dame.

"May I get a draught of cold water, madame?" His voice was as pleasant as his face.

"Surely, my lad! A dash of wine in't? No? Suit yourself, then. The water is within, and by it some new baked tarts on the table."

"You are over good, *bonne amie*! I will rub you the metal tazze, ere I begin painting the bench you spoke of."

"Now, *mon gars*! your hands are not made for such work——"

"Chut!" he struck in. "They would be stiff over my heart long since but for you! I go!" He vanished within into the Dame's kitchen across the court, smiling cheerfully at her.

"Who is he?" asked Marguerite. The Dame eyed her keenly, and made up her mind.

"You can be trusted not to blab a queer story? Ay! Here 'tis!

"Pons, see you, was once head turnkey to the Seigneur Raimond des Baux, Prince of Orange, at Les Baux in Provence, but six years back he had sense enow to hold his tongue about a drunken brawl, whereby his Highness's name might have suffered, for which service he was given this office in Naples. We had been here maybe two months when Pons sought me, with a wry face.

"'A new prisoner hath bad fever in the lower cells,' said he. 'He had best not die if they want to

try him. He was sent on from Altamura down Salerno way, "to keep till trial." Go you to him !

"So I found a slip of sixteen, raving and crying till it sickened me to see his big eyes blazing in his chalky face ; yet through my simples he was sane again in a few days ; but one night, when he was too weak to heed his words, I got his story from him.

"It seems (though few know't) that Prince Raimond was twice married, firstly to this lad's mother, a pretty gentle thing, cousin to the Count of Thoulouse, but a poor gentleman's daughter, with no fortune.

"Soon her husband felt he had made a bad alliance (he a Des Baux could have had a princess), and his mock love for her passed like smoke.

"Soon after her little son was born he ill-treated her—anyhow, she died shortly afterwards, and within the year he had wed Madonna Jehanne, Princess of Genoa. Young François reached fifteen, when one day he rowed on the Bay here alone—and was never seen again ! But that same evening the Count of Altamura had a prisoner, a "Provençal vassal to Orange," put into his safe-keeping, and held him a year—then I think he found out whom he really had in hand, and forthwith sent him hither to Capuana and here he hath been these six weary years ! Never a word as to his being either freed or tried ! He is Count of Andria in his right of eldest son to Orange, and now the first-born of the Genoa woman hath it. Pons having full power over the prisoners (unless he hath express orders otherwise), I spoke straightly :

" "I shall let the boy out here, lest he die of languor."

" "His escape means my head,' grumbled Pons.

" "Fool !' said I. 'A Des Baux' parole in prison

or out is good ! If he is righted any time, shall we lose by kindness ? He cannot escape from this yard, and it regards none but thou and I ! ’

“ Thus poor François came up to sunlight, and doth so every day. He is the best of lads—ever wishing to aid me, ever courteous as if I were a princess. St. Sarah of Arles ! I cannot fathom his father’s reasons for’t ! All I can think is, that his other children are sickly brats enough, and if they all die François might yet prove a trump card to prevent his nephew’s, Hugues des Baux’s, children from succeeding him.”

“ Certes, ’tis the only reason,” said Marguerite. “ Else why did he not drop François in a sack into the Bay that night ? ”

“ Why does he hate him at all ? ” went on the Dame. “ Ambition is a demon ! As if François’ mother’s race were not as ancient and she as honourable as the Genoan House, any day ! The Prince has sent not one soldo for the lad’s keep either, and the Government’s prisoner-rations are starvation—for long. Short-time prisoners are kept by friends. Thus we took the ration-money to buy him his rough clothes, and as none questions the food matters I keep him. He protested at first. ‘ Fichtre ! ’ said I, ‘ you may as well have these scraps as the Poor Nuns. Is my husband not your born vassal from Mondragon ? So sure as I hail from Sisteron des Alpes, we are your servants, and only your jailers by hard fate.’ ”

“ I knew not that Orange and Des Baux had rights of High and Low Justice in Naples over their Provençal vassals. I deemed them the Queen’s ! ” said Marguerite.

“So they are!” snapping her cotton off angrily. “But the poor Queen hath web enow of her own to unreave! She would free François now, if she knew! But I can never see her, or get a paper through, for those monkey-chamberlains who might lay it before Prince Raimond—and then we should all be lost! When next she comes to Capuana, I shall try to get a word with her myself. Coming! Coming, Pons!”

She went in, and Marguerite clapped her hands silently, and laughed. It was good to be royal sometimes! François came out bearing a bench and a pot of paint, and she smiled at him, glad again that as a jongleuresse she was free to talk to any one.

“May I aid your task?” she cried brightly. “Give me a brush!”

The paint-pot evoked memories of a forbidden childish joy, and of an escapade wherein figured vividly a painter of Taranto, in the palace corridor a soiled frock, and a rating from Donna Agneta.

Like Louis, she did most things well at first trial, and François saw naught amiss with her work.

The postern gate into the street opened, and the light it shed on the short passage into the yard made him look up, and then he sighed.

“Dash for’t!” said she carelessly.

“Ah, madame, the gate of my word passed to my kind jaileress is higher than any wall. Only on parole do I quit my cell.”

“I had forgot—she told me something of—I asked her—I am not indiscreet,” she stammered; but he only smiled sadly.

“Yet, were I you, temptation would be strong.”

Quick disappointment crossed his look.

“ Cannot a jongleuresse who sings ever of love and honour not guess it impossible to me ? ”

“ Yet I thought that all prisoners could transpose the lover’s motto, ‘ Amor—to Libertas omnia vincit,’ and hold freedom over all else,” she said somewhat tormentingly.

“ Why is it that all women, no matter their degree, never grasp the bond a true knight’s word is to him ? ” he queried sadly. “ Years ago I had a little cousin—just as you—she let her heart rule her sense of honour always, and would lie any day to save me from a penance.”

“ Nay ! ” she cried vexed at his quick opinion of her. “ I did but jest ! Certes, a man must keep oath, even though we women let heart rule head, as we have done from Dido to myself ! ”

“ Happily—else we should not find you half so interesting. But poor Madame Dido’s heart-rule had terrible ending—I ever pitied her. Where got you your learning of Latin thus, madame, an I may ask ? ”

“ I was taught by some nuns,” picked Marguerite, mindful of the stately Abbess of St. Lucia di Taranto. “ Oft one read me Messer Virgil’s *Æneids*.”

From his tunic-folds he drew a small parchment leaf book roughly bound in sendal.

“ These are but his rustics, his bucolics ; yet I hold them his sweetest works, for his visions of wide green fields, fair rivers, and free folk, oft delight my dark days—which are frequent, despite the Dame’s goodness. She got me this book from a poor scholar’s cell—he having gone to hear the divine Virgil himself in the Elysian Fields. I envy him often.”

“ Oh, were I you I should run mad ! ” she cried

impetuously. "Why live such monsters as your tyrant unsmitten of heaven?"

"Hush-sh!" said he, a hand on her jimped sleeve. "None must hear! I may have deserved my fate—I was a wild, wilful lad—to lock me up was my sire's idea of banishment to a hated thing——"

"Domna nostra!" she said passionately. "I cannot think you a milksop—yet you speak folly! A brute breaks your life's every sweetness by seven dreadful years in jail, yet you make excuse for him! Sire or no sire, I should try to kill him!"

"My hate was hot at first," said he, looking her full in the face, yet speaking very low. "But my mother loved him once, and for her sake it became easier to bear, not because I hated him less, but because I understood his motive after. His love for her turned to hate, and that is ever the worst kind of hatred. I am very like her in ways, and looks, so he loathed me. His injustice to me is that had he told me this plainly, I would have ridden off to France or Palestine and never vexed him more;—but no! I was thrown to rot here! Hate him! He slew my mother in intent, if not in deed, and for her sake I could slay him—in fair fight—now! My own wrong I could forgive, because—eh—because my old tutor, Frère Aidan, taught me some follies (you may call them) as to forgiveness of foes."

His pale face flushed, and his grip tightened on the brush he held, dignifying the homely thing into semblance of a sword, and as he stood there tense with fierce feeling, Marguerite knew very surely that this was no milksop but a Man. All the youths she had yet known had held quick bloody vengeance for even slight insults the true creed, and to find one who

forgave for such reasons as his, a life-wrong, roused her inmost curiosity and sympathy. But he dipped the brush sharply in the paint.

"Forgive me! Captivity makes me too talkative! I weary you with my griefs," he said, reddening still more.

"Nay, blame me for questioning so far! Yet it was but for sympathy. Even if we seem strangers, I feel as if I had known you longer, and folk ever confide in me. I draw them somehow," she said, holding out her hand frankly.

"Gracious friend, 'tis strange, but I also felt that with you! Old Pythagoras, you know, saith that souls have many persons. Who knows if you were not once some adorable Greek nymph, and I a happy shepherd, who talked with you in the forests, and now we meet——"

Here came interruption. Louis, crossing the court, spied her sparkling eyes and the youth's eager expression, and read thence that his wilful sister followed her habit of making perfectly unhappy every lad she neared.

Mischief glowed in the Prince of Taranto's eye.

"Hey, wife! Come within to our meal!" he called cheerfully.

François painted on, a sudden damp on his spirits.

"His wife!" he muttered, as they entered the sala. "What is it to me? François des Baux, art a fool indeed that a few kind words stir thee so!"

And Louis said in her ear meanwhile:

"Leave him alone, naughty maid!"

"What did I, pray? Mean you I trifled with him? Bah! stupid! He is not like the young fools at home. Honi soit qui mal y pense!" indignantly.

"Good then, cara! I did but ask! He looks too good a fellow to make fret for a freak, 'tis all! Since you are warned, I say no more."

"She falls in love and out again, once a week usually," he thought. "Her caprices are never serious, praise the saints!"

But even a wise Louis may be mistaken at times! And during the next week the Princess of Taranto and the luckless prisoner certainly developed an extraordinary talent for finding occupation in the courtyard at the same time.

"I met Madonna Mabrice di Pace this morn," said Louis to Marguerite.

"And changed amorous gazes, I doubt not," teased she.

"Not I! Foolish maid!" with an attempted playful slap, which she evaded nimbly.

"But she is of use, for she wishes to present me to Arnaud de Coutignac, the Queen's trovere, so that he may give us some tickets for the Court d'Amour at Capua, for none but known troveres are to be admitted. So I said we would meet them for supper to-night at the Tazza d'Oro. She did not look best pleased when I mentioned my wife! I will make her the cobla this afternoon. I thought to go with this Arnaud to Capua would be pleasant, and then I will make a canzone for the Queen and sing it there—or, stay! I will make one, but he shall sing it, and make a mystery of the writer. Eh, picture the jape of being solemnly called up to be presented to our mother and the others!"

"But what if she packs me home again in anger? I am so happy with thee, brother!"

Louis laughed.

"Time enough yet to weary of this frolic, in a week and more. But what concerns me is that do what I will I cannot catch sight of the Queen. She seems to keep the Castel from sheer perversity. One would think she knew her wandering, mad cousin was a-gaze for her !

"I learned, too, in my trot this morn how badly hated are the Hungarians—never one passed but some Italian spat or made 'the Evil Eye' sign at him. I followed one captain of horse up Via Carbonara—and heard him cursed just seventeen times !"

Dame Blanchine and her other lodger, the jovial Barberoux, came into the sala shaking with laughter.

"Ho ! ho ! ho ! Such a jest !" roared the Dame, mopping her eyes. "Heard you ever of one Conrad the Wolf, Messire Vivien ?"

"Once over," said cautious Louis.

"Barberoux knows an ill-deedy Saxon in his troop, who told him that some clever fellow went to an inn at Pavosa, and quarrelled with the Wolf. 'Twas dark, and St. Anne alone knows what truly happed, but the fellow knocked Conrad on the head, tied him in bed, and went off in his mail, riding at the troop head into Naples—made an excuse to dismount, and vanished in the dark ! There lay the Wolf at the inn till anon, when the frightened landlord hath just come to Castel Nuovo to get a litter for him ! Oh the brave villain who did't ! The best is, that none of them can describe the man ! In dark he came, in dark he left them, and the cruel Huns are so cursing mad !—— Go on, Barberoux—I must laugh !"

And laugh she did, till she cried. The great German grinned.

"Our Dame is a staunch Jehanniste ! She bet me

all Huns were asses long since. But 'tis very fine ! I would give a month's pay to have that same rascal in my troop—he must be a rare one ! Why, Conrad's mail has been found in San Gennaro all neatly in a sack ! ”

“ I ever heard Conrad was cruel,” said Louis.

Dame Blanchine stopped laughing. “ Cruel ! Why, even Michel, the Head Tormentor, refused to work under him here ! There, enough ! Your wife goes white—she is unused to it. Ho, I come, Pons ! I have no wings yet—Baudet impatient ! ”

On their way to the Tazza d'Oro that night the brother and sister took an indirect course, walking on the shore where the blue waves lapped the quays, and whence they could see the great new fort of St. Elmo behind the town and Ischia in the sea. Then they went amid the gay booths, past Castel de l'Ovo on the sand, and back again by the Porta Reale of Castel Nuovo, with its grim iron portcullis grinning dog-toothed in the dusk.

A figure in crimson satin mantle with gorgeous diamond-dusted plume in its cap, followed by four gentlemen-in-waiting, crossed the drawbridge and was saluted by the guards' lifted pikes as the gate rose promptly.

“ There goes Philippe ! ” said Louis gleefully to Marguerite. “ I saw Niccolo Accaiuolo this morn, but I pulled down my hood, and he knew me not ! We shall have a merrier night than either, I'll vow ! Come we back now to Larga Carbonara and the Tazza d'Oro.”

The fashionable inn's chief room was large, square, hung with stamped leather wall-hangings, and furnished with elegant carved chairs, while richly

wrought brass lamps shed light on well-liveried servers.

Mabrice di Pace, however, had arrived first, and had ordered supper in a smaller room behind, and now waited them with Arnaud de Coutignac. The Queen's Maids had the graceful privilege of dispensation from duennas, and so walked Naples at will, immune from annoyance as nuns, known by their blue crown-broidered mantles ; so that Mabrice was alone with the famous trovere.

He was a thin man, very light on his feet, with pointed fair beard and moustache, over which his fine blue eyes shot dreamy but expressive glances.

Louis's look countered his with the glance of instinctive inquiry, then knew a friend, and dropped hostility.

Mabrice introduced them to each other, and then Louis presented "his wife Rita" to her, and gave her the promised cobla, a pretty trifle, which pleased her fastidious taste ; and she smiled graciously upon him.

She was an odd girl : vain, light, ready to jest with a handsome man, stranger or friend ; and yet below all that there was a certain dark ferocity unguessed by any, and never so far fully roused. Louis attracted her, and even though he had a wife, she made no difference in her manner to him—indeed, she was more than amiable to Marguerite, for she secretly hoped that he might sing her a cobla in the coming Court d'Amour—or, if not there, at another one.

Marguerite took an early chance to inform her that she was convent-reared, and of her marriage with Louis, even as she had done for the Dame ; so that Mabrice treated the supposed jongleuresse as her

equal, and they chatted of trifles, while Louis and Arnaud began to speak of Queen Jehanne. Arnaud spoke eloquently.

“She is never from my mind for more than an hour! I hold myself most blessed among men, that I might voice her praise to the world! To-day she looked at me on the terrace—I made a canzone at once. When you see her, you will know you have only then beheld the light of day——”

“Wait, messire,” said Louis, watching his ecstatic gestures curiously. “I am well used to the hot praise of our Gaie Science, and its heightening of the beloved’s charm. But this Queen, this Eighth Wonder, lauded of high and low alike—man to man, tell me honestly—is she all you say?”

“Oh, unbeliever from most remote regions!” cried Arnaud, opening wide his blue eyes. “She is! A thousand times—she is! And then I have not sung the half of her adorableness! I spare rhapsody. But Queen Jehanne is all good things in one! Let her be what you will, grave or gay, she is alike irresistible! She is strong, she is fierce, she is great. Her eyes in wrath are soul-scorching flames—in gentleness, the Day Star itself! Oh, in her gentle mood she is strongest—she lays hold on one’s heart with flower-petal-soft finger-tips, but that clasp is firmer than another’s steel fetters. I spend my life singing of her loveliness.”

Louis slipped his *vielle* from shoulder and laid it on a chair, as the supper of grilled quails, fried fish, and *panneforte* was carried in; but when the servers were gone to fetch wine he spoke.

“Give me your word, messire and madonna, that you will tell no other person your opinion of my voice

until I free you from promise, and I will sing for you—a mad request, but I am a whimsical fellow. I would fain compete for the Golden Lily at the Court d'Amour—but I am very vain of my verse, and if another man sings it, I should be most sure of its separate merit. Thus I am doubtful of singing it myself——”

“Strange—but we of the Gaie Science are all mad somewhere! Ay, I promise, and Madonna Mabrice nods,” said Arnaud, as Louis took up the vielle.

“Give me your canzone of to-day,” he said; and Arnaud gave it.

Then he sang. The liquid sounds thrilled and soared, exquisitely sweet, alive with passion and desire, natural, unforced as a bird's willing notes. The union of the passionate words and the silvery flute of a voice was perfect, and when the last splendid note died Arnaud, true impulsive Southerner, flung his arms round the singer's neck.

“Oh, golden voice! Oh, divine gift!” he cried. “King of troveres, hail! The Golden Lily is thine already! Not sing thyself? Madness! Why, Messer Orpheus, forgive a humble singer for not knowing thee before! Sing again. Come morn, I hale thee to the Queen perforce!”

Arnaud was too great a trovere to let jealousy's least shade cloud his joy in this wonderful discovery of art.

But Louis held up a warning hand. “Your promise!” he said calmly. “I may be mad, but I do not wish to sing to the Queen till the Court—perchance not then. If I so decide, will you sing me the canzone I shall make when once I have seen her?”

Arnaud made a despairing gesture: “Eh, man! I must humour you, lest you depart and leave me

lamenting—I will! But, pray—repent, and sing to Jehanne the Unsurpassed ere then!”

“Certes, I will sing to her—but in my own time. Nay, madonna, you are too kind.”

Mabrice, completely enthralled by the magic of the song, bent suddenly and kissed his hands.

“Hail, Master of Song!” she cried. “O happiest of women, to cage such nightingale for thine!” to Marguerite.

“You are mad as Herod!” declared Arnaud. “Why, you would be the talk of the kingdom in a week! Not sing! Oh, folly of an immortal! I will only keep silence and you will come to my lodging and sing to me each day till Capua!”

“May I not tell the Queen?” begged Mabrice; but Louis was firm.

“No! No! I will sing all you will, but to you alone, till I choose. Here comes the drawer with the Falernian! Let us hope he has not been listening outside! Drink now, and eat this very excellent fish!”

And to their laughing disgust he would not hear another word of praise all the evening, and they parted with promises of a merry meeting at Posilippo the next afternoon.

CHAPTER X

“Amour si ton poder ist tal
Enfins que cadun ho raysonne !”

PEYRE REMOND DE TOULOUSE.

A WEEK is but short space in some things, but to Marguerite and François the time had flown. Despite all resolves not to do so, he haunted the courtyard of Capuana whenever she was there, and found the hours when she was absent with Louis intolerable.

She, on her side, could not banter and tease this calm, sad youth as she did the dashing young Tarentine nobles. Instinct told her that high gaiety made his bondage seem the more galling, so she showed him her gentlest, most delightful self, with the result that he fell in love with her, heart and soul. Honour and reason fled before her spell, and he lived in jealous torment every time Louis, cheerful and indifferent, crossed the court. Poor François! Yet he kept silence, and his torment ate his very soul out.

Two days before the fête at Capua, Marguerite told him of Louis's intended *sirvente* to the Queen, and of Arnaud's friendship.

“Would I could go!” he sighed. “Fain would I hear good song again! The roaring chorus of the soldiers, and the few jongleurs who drift here are but faint echoes of our sweet singers at Les Baux. Once I too made songs, but here——”

“Have you naught you can remember?”

“No! Yet stay—I made one trifle since I have been here. Here ’tis, madame.”

She tossed her head very slightly. “Madame” from him jarred oddly.

He handed her a parchment slip, and she read eagerly, first silently, then, as its swing took her aloud, and in keen excitement.

It was the prisoner’s heart-cry for freedom as the young Queen rode by, and he clasped the bars of his high grating to see her pass—and ended with her passing away unseeing of his despair. Its pathos and perfect rhyme struck pity and admiration to their deepest depths.

“O, messire, you are great! I vow Arnaud shall sing this to the Queen! She would free you for’t! He is beyond vengeance of your foes—he shall! Refuse not!”

“Madame, I can refuse you naught. Your gentleness has been a world to me. Will you not sing to me?” He seemed to find speech difficult on a sudden.

Tactfully she turned the subject, marking his trouble, and sang a pretty trifle of her own making about a queen and her rose garden, a queen who gave her heart unasked, so that it faded like the roses. Louis called her just then to go into the city with him, and as François watched her flutter out with her tall companion he groaned aloud. Dame Blanchdine, padding with the silent step of most big-built women, came up and touched his shoulder gently.

“What’s amiss, petiot?”

“O—naught!” But she shrugged in scorn.

“Naught!” she mocked friendly. “Then ‘naught’

makes paler face and scanter appetite ? Eh, mon gars ! I am not blind—I see ! ”

He raised a crimson face, and cried in quick fear :

“ If you see—what danger ! I love Her—and He—terrible ! ”

But the Dame grinned in a way which made him grip her wrist.

“ You mock me ? Oh——”

“ Nay. Hear comfort, great child ! She is not his wife ! Not she ! Women spy farther than any man, and I am right ! Oh, start not—they are honest, though I cannot quite guess them out. I think perchance he is a faithful retainer, who has helped her escape a convent or distasteful wedding. A dozen little signs tell me they are not wed. Cousins on a frolic, maybe ? Yet wait securely, for all comes to light in time ! No despairs, my lad ! ”

“ Despair ! ” groaned François. “ Why, what in life can I hope, but existence here. Could I sue her rightly, even were I sure she is free ? Make her sad for a worth-naught like me ? Once I heard my friends in agonies over their love passages and in ‘ despairs.’ Fools ! Shall any true man despair, with freedom and four sound limbs, to win his lady through any barrier ? But a prisoner as I am——Leave me, dear friend, to battle with myself, and pray that she may soon leave Naples, and I forget——”

The Dame for all her noisy ways had much tact, and she left him sitting there for some time.

The morn of the grand Court d’Amour dawned clear and blue, a true Neapolitan September day, and as the first sun-rays shot over Somna and Vesuvius, the road to Capua was astir with people anxious to get there before they grew too hot. Overnight, Louis

had hired two ponies, which he fetched early, but even as he came along Arnaud waited for him by the postern door of Capuana, altering his steed's girths. One of Louis's ponies turned restive, which upset the other, so that it waltzed across the Vico. Arnaud fast with his own beast could not help. Pons ran out and joined in the *mêlée*. A trumpet-blare sounded on the main road.

"There go some of the royal train now! Is your wife ready? Women are ever late," said Arnaud. François strolled out and looked up the street—over the threshold he might not pass—and sighed.

"May I call Madame?" he asked. Louis busy with the girths nodded. Accidentally François gave the same tripping tap that Louis ever did, and Marguerite opened sharply.

He started back with wild wonder, for she held two ivory pins, wherewith she was coiling up a rippling golden shower of hair, and the short dark curly wig lay upon the table!

"Why—what—?" he stammered, and there was such utter bewilderment on his face that she laughed—yet saw he was beyond laughter.

"I am not—a jongleuresse—" she faltered. He took her hand in a clasp there was no evading, and his voice was hard as he asked—

"Are you his wife? Who are you?"

"No!—His sister—t'was a jest, a freak—I—you must wait—I cannot say my name——" she faltered, watching the amazing changes flitting in his look. Then on a sudden they understood each other, and she looked up, a new glow in her eyes.

"Art glad?" she asked softly. And then she could not speak for good reasons.

“Ma mie—” he said very low. “But I am unworthy—whoe’er you are——”

She slipped from his arms, and hastily coiled up her hair, and donned the dark curls.

“Not another question, beloved! I shall free thee to-day—or anon. My brother calls now! Till this even, dearest.”

In another moment she had run down, and was in her saddle unaided, in the Vico, smiling till Louis looked uneasily at her.

They rode from Porta Capuana along the white road, amid a motley throng, of squires and pages bearing shields, helms, and mantles, trovere, and jongleurs of all degrees, some afoot, some a-horse; knights escorting ladies, monks, lazzaroni in many hued rags, tumblers turning somersaults by the way—all the rabble of a Neapolitan crowd.

Then passed a splendid little train all a-jingle, and a-gleam with mail and gold-fringed housings; a blue satin tabarded squire bore a banner with the sixteen-pointed comet of the Maison des Baux.

“There rides the Seneschal of Provence,” said Arnaud, as Hugues des Baux passed them at the trot on his big roan, Destrier.

“Raimond des Baux comes not methinks. There go Savoy’s white and red pennons, a-head! Bertrand des Baux will ride with his friend, the Red Count.

“Countess Ithamar tells me the Empress will not come to-day, but to the wonder of all men, Prince Andrea sent the Queen word early this morn that he will attend! None can fathom it! He at a Court d’Amour! Ha!

“That peculiar fanfare is the Queen’s own escort’s! Pull we to one side and now at last you will see her

come. If you sing that most innane canzone you gave me to read yestereve, I will eat it, faith of a trovere ! ”

Louis laughed as they wheeled their beasts off the road on to the field, which sloped level and hedgeless on either side.

Louis had, despite every effort, never seen Jehanne until now. Fate seemed adverse, and he had missed her at every turn, even by a few moments. He had made a canzone, which Arnaud flouted as wooden, and he had meant to sing it in his assumed rôle of unknown trovere, trusting to his voice's charm to do her honour, more than to the words. He had been in two minds and had almost decided to let Arnaud sing it, but he had yielded to the united entreaties of Mabrice and the trovere to let his gift shine to all Naples, and so rode forth.

A long roar of cheers ran like wind in long grass, as the crowd cleared left and right of the road. Arnaud pleasantly gossipy rambled on ; as the Guard clanged by, their mail silver in the sun, under the great banner of Anjou :

“ Our Jehanne always rides—and mostly at the pace of King Jehu the Furious. Her demon of a steed, Eblis, none but she can back—nor even bridle unless she be in the stall. This vexes the Prince, but she never heeds it.”

Louis's gaze was riveted on his long sought sight. Now at last he saw Queen Jehanne face to face, and she struck him dumb and stiff. In that one instant his world, plans, and hopes were shattered and made a-new.

She sat throned on a huge black horse, fretting, prancing, yet obedient to every turn of her slim

wrist on his golden rein ; her clinging, white samite robe showed every line of her lovely supple figure, slender yet strong, graceful as a swaying lily. But the glory of the face below the jewelled coronet, and the light of the eyes which outshone the diamonds therein, passed all descriptions of Arnaud or any other.

And suddenly those eyes met his !

Jehanne started, and the steed half-reared at her check on the bit.

For there beside Arnaud de Coutignac, in the light of day rode the Man of her strange vision of the night of long ago—he the Impossible, as she had told Giovanni ! But in a moment she closed her wonder-parted lips, drove back the flush, the amazement from her face, and smiled friendly at Arnaud, who saluted her to the saddle bow.

Louis had ridden into the adventure lightly, for a whim, a revel, meaning to ride out as lightly, with a song before his brothers and her, or some like jesting dénouement—he had planned it all, even to picturing the grimaces his brothers would make at being so tricked by him.

But now with that one look at her the game grew earnest, the card-house of his jest was wrecked by the sudden flood of fierce passion—swept away in one wave.

Then came a chill like the tramontano wind in the southern mid-day heat. A little behind Jehanne on a quiet bay horse, with awkward manner and uneasy seat, sat her husband, the white-visaged, slovenly Prince.

Louis's dream was broken, and he roused himself to find Arnaud dragging his elbow.

“Eh man ! Who said I overdrew her splendour ? What ? Now perchance you will be glad to sing to her.”

Louis gathered his reins with scarce feeling hands, and his voice was hoarse as he replied :

“Sing that wretched canzone ? No, not for the Lily ! She is Artemis herself ! Sing you your ‘Golden Lips,’ for I raise not a note to-day ! I am dumb stricken. You were right.”

“What ? Not sing ! O chaos of my hopes ! O misfortune of the Muse !”

Arnaud ran into a chorus of laments, persuaded, stormed, entreated, but all to no purpose. Louis was inflexible, and rode on as one deaf.

“He would not budge for an earthquake. I know his mood !” said Marguerite, and Arnaud sank into regretful silence, as they rode on to Capua.

This Court d’Amour at Capua was the most splendid held there since the patrician residents of Roman Campania filled its great arena to see the fearful gladiatorial games ; now for a peaceful strife it was as gorgeous a picture as any of old.

From a huge, central mast ran a gigantic spider’s web of silk ropes supporting the fine linen canopy over the whole vast Roman shell of masonry. This and the other poles were all twined with garlands of roses and ferns, while to lessen the great heat, white pillars of snow from the Calabrian mountains stood at intervals on the arena’s sand. Queen Jehanne’s azure velvet, gold-stamped with Anjou’s fleur-de-lys, covered the editorial seat, a broken marble bench, as regally as ever Cæsar’s purples, but her present throne was a backless Greek stool of ivory and silver,

standing upon a square of shell-pink velvet, with a footstool of pink rose-heads. On the steps ascending to it, covered with cloth of silver, stood six beautiful pages clad as Mercuries, in close hose of pink silk, with white swan-wings on their shoulders, and holding silver trumpets for the signals.

Above the stool was the canopy of ferns and roses designed by Arnaud, and at the foot of the steps were seats for Princess Marie, Duchess Agnes, and the Princes of the blood, with whom sat Andrea, since the Queen of the Court must sit alone, but behind her sat her lesser ladies, and at her right hand on a table lay the Golden Lily the prize of the day, a fine pearl for its heart, and exquisitely wrought by a noted Florentine smith. Across the arena were the jongleurs appointed squires of the trovere for the day, holding their principals' armour and swords, for by the laws of the Song-Contest, if one singer liked not another's verse or sentiments, he might challenge him to joust with blunted weapons, and this made some pretty encounters.

Judgment on the songs was given by twelve fair ladies experienced in every nuance and turn of song and tender passion, with the Queen's as a casting vote, should they divide equally in opinion.

Thus went the contest :

Two singers upheld each their lady, and the victor met another; if he vanquished him, he sang on again till ten were thus conquered. Then he met the victor of another ten, and against him sang for the final victory. If the Court were like to-day a large one there might be four or five in the last tenzon, and this made it exciting as whist, for a single lost trick barred a man from the whole.

They sang at two ivory desks in the arena, under a sounding-board of cedar, in front of the Queen's throne.

Prince Andrea was smiling sourly to-day, well content to be the chill on the gay gathering's spirits, the worm in the rose of his wife's pleasure. He hated the trovere and all their works, but to-day he eyed them with the grim joy of an ogre watching his victims nearing his trap.

"Eh, wait only!" he chuckled to himself. "One sweep of our Eastern steel's wind will send these rotten moths flying in clouds from the land! And she—Aha!"

But across the arena hidden among the jongleurs sat Louis of Taranto, watching the Queen's every breath, intent on one thing only—the desire to speak to her soon. His plans were confused, he knew not whether to end the farce next day, and go boldly to Castel Nuovo, or use Mabrice and see her as the jongleur. Meanwhile he watched, and the entreaties of Arnaud to him to sing were unavailing. Arnaud went forth to lead off the first tenzon, with one Bertrand de Pezars (singing for his lady Rixende d'Auraison).

Of the many trovere in their bravery of sendal, gold lace, white plumes, gems and perfumes, mustered that day the roll is over long, yet may be noted in the lists, Marchbruse de Poitou (singing to Blanche de Cadenet), Taraudet de Flassans, knight to Iseult Roger, Guillaume Boyer of Nice the adorer of Madeleine de Berre, all noble by birth as well as song.

These for Provence, and for Italy as many more.

Arnaud in his first tension stated that Naples could show more than Provence in loveliness, yet that its

fairest flower was Provençal, and that his unknown lady was fairest of all.

Voice, words, fancy, vanquished de Pezars, and Arnaud dealt alike with the first ten. White faces showed among the fair ranks below the Queen, as he held his victorious way, and the trovere nudged sides among each other, as they saw through the thin gauze veiling the Lady.

The sunny day wore on, the little pages handed round iced wines and sweet confections on golden salvers, the ivory-handled pen on the jury's dainty parchments worked busily as needles, the maids and varlets plied long-stalked fans ceaselessly, the flow of song rolled sweetly smooth.

Andrea wearied of the whole performance, and then, heedless of the best and wittiest song of Italy, log-like, he yawned, dozed—and finally snored aloud.

Clear in the hush following the defeat of Marchbruse by Arnaud, in the beginning of the final tenzon of four, a snore penetrating even to the common audience broke from the Prince.

Picture, if you can, the titter which circled the arena. Even in the Court seats—covert, but none the less a jeer.

Nicholas Ungaro and the Ban of Croatia fast in their seats below the bevy of goddesses of the jury could not rouse him, and Mabrice di Pace, heedless of her duty as loyal Chamberlain's daughter, though near her Prince, had become a maid of wax, with eyes only for Queen Jehanne.

For a moment Jehanne looked about her, saw the red faces of even her friends, the kerchiefs stuffed in the mouths, Amaury's averted head, marked the coarser sniggers beyond the Court pale.

Then deliberately she rose, and stepping down three steps, spoke to Marie, who was playing nervously with her embroidered veil.

"Wake the hog!" she whispered. Marie looked afraid.

"Is't well what you do?" she asked. "Do't yourself—I like not."

"I will not be the mock of Naples!" returned Jehanne. "Do as I bid you, ma mie."

Marie leaned over, and touched Andrea's head.

Jehanne stepped back, and sat down again with a challenge in her eye as she glared round the circle that no impudent boy in the people's seats could brook with a chuckle, she raised the flower-twined silver baton she held, for the next tenzon to begin.

A sudden cheer rose from the whole arena, and effectually roused Andrea, who seeing naught, deemed it for the singers, but Friar Robert mumbling his finger-tips with rage, in a seat far off, noted to some purpose.

Then when of the thirty trovere only one remained, the last of the chosen three of the tens, a famous Milanese Gaetano, who upheld a lady of Verona, and Arnaud the wonderful, the unfailing of melody and wit, knew his time was come for his greatest canzone of the day, the one he had sent by Cavaillon, wherein the mysterious "Labri d'Oro," was revealed as Jehanne the Incomparable.

The applause was fit to rend the canopy on high, and in the storm of sound Arnaud smiled. He guessed that shouts of "Sing again!" would rush close behind it, and they did.

Then he drew out a parchment, and instead of some raptured canzone, alba, or witty *sirvente*, the

wildly pathetic prisoner's lament made melodious the air. The audience waited for it to turn to some pretty allegory of love-captivity of trovere-dom, but it ended in the same strain.

None the less they applauded hotly.

Jehanne listened, puzzled, and attentive, to the strange song, the woe of bondage finding echo in her own soul, and jumping oddly in connection with thoughts of her realised Dream Face. She was eager for the Court to end, so that she might question Arnaud, perchance speak with the Other.

It seemed long till the jury had got through the form of the final vote, till the heralds had cried that the Lily was Messire de Coutignac's.

Then Arnaud marched forward to take the Lily and palm wreath from her hands.

"Who wrote that song, messire? Not you me-thinks? That prisoner's woe rings too bitter to be aught but true material bondage."

She was raking the audience with her gaze, but could not find Louis, for he had effaced himself behind a pillar.

Arnaud thought of the hundred ears which would hear François' story, and spied Raimond's wife, Princess of Genoa, a subdued, sad lady. Why shame her with her husband's past villainies?

"Most Perfect, grant me to tell you later."

Jehanne nodded graciously.

"As Victor of Capua you have right to ride home by me. Tell me then," she said.

With a blare of trumpets, a roar of cheers, and a wild stampede into the open to see the Queen ride by, the great Court d'Amour of Capua was ended.

She leant low in her saddle as Arnaud's jennet

trotted beside tall Eblis, a little flush on her cheek, "One more question, messire. Who is the tall man who rode with you this morning! I have never seen him in Naples, yet he seems familiar to me——"

Arnaud glanced up curiously at her.

"Most Gracious, he is a French trovere, one Vivien de Chartres, a new-comer to Naples—but though he calls himself de Chartres, I dub him Orpheus, for such a voice as his has never struck my ear—no, not in all my world-walkings! I did my best to make him sing to-day, but he would not—he is whimsical as the wind! He may depart as he came——"

"Could you get him to sing to me?" she said eagerly. "I must hear him if *you* praise him thus——"

"Aha! She is curious." thought Arnaud, then aloud, "He shuns the Court, Altesse—I know not why. Nothing he ever does is reasonable!"

"You rouse my curiosity beyond bounds. A trovere who shuns Courts! See now, messire, could you get him to come to say—the Tazza d'Oro, to-night? I will don a plain robe, and in company with our dear, discreet Giovanni (who would take me to the moon did I so ask him) slip from the garden postern, for an hour or two. You can tell your trovere that I am—let me consider—ah yes, I am Countess of Forcalquier—that will serve—and that I love song, and my jealous husband doth not? You understand? I should love to come out thus, for once to have a merry night!"

"So did King Haroun Al Raschid by all accounts! Bene! If it pleases my exalted Star to prowl all Naples I am at her service! I will have him alone at the Tazza d'Oro, to meet my noble patroness

Madame de Forcalquier from nine o' the clock onwards."

Jehanne laughed as she shook Eblis' rein, and they bounded forward towards Naples.

* * * * *

Torches flashed yellow in the soft southern dusk of the evening after the Court d'Amour.

"Who goes there?" challenged the sentry at Castel Capuana.

"The Grand Justicer of Naples! St. Martha and Salerno!" came answer and password of the night.

Bertrand des Baux, fresh from a gay scene of Castel Nuovo, by his magnificent dark blue satin cotte hardie, slashed with green and silver, stood, an incongruous figure, in the dark inner courtyard whither hurried Pons with his keys.

"Take me to the young fellow called François, in cells line four," consulting a paper. Pons, all a-scare, obeyed.

François, sound asleep on his hard bed, stirred at the voices, so loud in the narrow cell, and started up equally startled and alarmed.

Was trial coming at last? But ere his fears could fully shape, a well-known remembered face showed in the lantern-dazzle—his father's cousin Bertrand.

But François was a Des Baux also, and hid the suspense which swept him, the fears which crept, and met the stern brown eyes firmly, as he rose. Then to his intense surprise, Bertrand laughed and clasped his hand with:

"Ha, my long-drowned cousin! Seem a little gladder to see me again! St. Sarah of Arles! I never thought to see you more! I can spy you still for the same little lad who rode on my spear at Les

Baux fourteen years ago. Come with me, and stretch free legs at last ! ”

“ Why ? How ? I thought myself abandoned of heaven and earth ! You knew I am clean of all crime—am I for trial ? ” He could not believe his ears.

“ Pfui ! Never say die ! ” said Bertrand brushing a cobweb from his sleeve. “ Nay, De Coutignac told the Queen, who sent me now post haste to see if you were truly the missing Des Baux, and to free you at once. Pardie ! You will pass even in those rough sacks of clothes, to please her eye for a smart lad. Here—don my cloak to pass the throng at Castel Nuovo, and mount my squire’s horse. Come ! Surely you would not linger in this hole another moment ! ”

Too dazed to either grasp fully, or question the miracle thus come, François followed Bertrand with quite unsteady step, and only when he felt the trotting steed warm between his knees, and the night wind on his cheek did he realise anything of his freedom ; and even so it seemed but part of a vivid dream, as they passed the busy gate of Castel Nuovo, and the brilliant throng in the Long Sala, with its lights and music.

“ Humph ! ” thought Bertrand silently, “ I enjoy this letting loose of this handsome lad on my old beast of a Raimond ! He is a better Des Baux than either his brats, or Hugues’s.”

They reached a quiet room with soft, rose-coloured lamp-light, and François fell on one knee vaguely knowing the Queen’s presence.

She, glorious in a white cloudy robe, held an enchanting hand to him which broke the spell of unreality.

"You are the Count of Andria?" His lost name struck him so strangely that he halted, but faltered presently:

"They called me that once, Majesty!"

"Be seated, messire—you are faint. Small wonder! The *Sieur de Coutignac* told me your terrible story, and sang your splendid song at the Court. I sent Count Bertrand at once; I fear you have suffered very greatly. Wine, *Mabrice*, quickly! I am quite unstrung to think such horror could be done unknown to me!"

François threw himself at her feet and clasped her gown, unmanned by the sudden relief.

"Make no excuse," she said gently, and raised him. "Tell me of your life."

Brokenly he spoke of the horrors of *Altamura* of Naples, and of Dame *Blancdine's* kindly freeing in the yard, of *Vivien the trovere*, *Arnaud*; but of *Marguerite* no word.

"Majesty, I ask no vengeance on my sire," he ended. "Only my freedom and pardon for my kind jailers."

Jehanne smiled and mused.

"You say very rightly there! 'Twould cause terrible scandal did I now arraign my own Grand Chamberlain—and alas! it would not restore you your spent youth. Yet were it any but he, and the state lay not as it does now, I give you my word I would have had his head for it! But I will take a vengeance more pleasing to both you and me. Your County of Andria is large—a little larger 'twould be very well as a Dukedom. I cannot have too many of my loyal *Provençaux* at hand—I owe you amends for what neither of us could help: ah, my poor friend,

what you have suffered ! Your sword, Count ! ” to Bertrand.

“ Kneel, Duke of Andria, and put hands in mine for your fief ! Soon you shall have your place in the Hall of Peers.”

François never knew how he got through repeating the simple oath of fealty after her, and her parting smile, and his own stumbling attempt at speech as the door closed and shut out the vision of her all swam in confusion as Bertrand took him away.

“ I must be mad ! ” he said wildly, as Bertrand’s strong arm helped him from saddle on Larga Carbonara before a tall narrow house. “ An hour ago—Castel Capuana !—impossible ! She has made me a Duke ! Madness ! ”

“ I knew she would right you,” replied Bertrand. “ That is our Jehanne’s way : a handsome face, a pitiful tale like yours—and—I am not amazed. She has shrewd eye for merit in a man, too, and holds you a good bargain ; besides, the vexation ’twill cause your father ! Naught is a wonder in these days—I may be a Duke myself in her next generous fit ! Titles fly about like bees ! I have brought you to the Count of Savoy’s house, where you can sleep, but you must quit Naples at dawn. You are no fool, François, I take it, and you must know that young resurrected Dukes catch fevers, when their enemies come to their raising ! I like you, lad, and wish you to have your Duchy. The Queen is great—but soon she will be great enough to ward such—fevers—from her faithful subjects. In Amalfi the air is pure, and at cockcrow you ride there with a letter from me to the President of its Republic, and there stay till you hear more.

Here is gold," emptying a pouch of lys d'or on the table.

"Ay, send my squire, to give your old jaileress one or two, but go not yourself. Sleep safe, however, for the men of Savoy are like our own. I will tell the Queen of your going—and send you a suit of mine to ride in." With which mingled instructions he left him, still trying to grasp the astounding events of the day, and only when the squire shook him next morning with, "Get up, seigneur! The horses wait!" did François quite believe it was not a dream.

But no sooner had Bertrand and François left Castel Nuovo that night than Jehanne sought in her armoire for a certain green mantle.

CHAPTER XI

“ Ahi ! Sera sub rosa !
N’importe, chi lo sa ? ”

It was rather late in the evening when Arnaud de Coutignac and Louis arrived at the Tazza d’Oro ; indeed there were already fewer lamps left burning in the sala. They called for wine and sat by the round oaken table in one corner of the big room.

“ Methinks your dame will not come to-night,” said Louis, yawning slightly. “ Was she at the Court ? She may be too weary.”

“ Madame de Forcalquier is rarely weary,” said Arnaud smiling. “ And she greatly wished to hear you sing. She will come anon.”

“ She is Provençale you said ? ”

“ Yes,” said Arnaud curtly.

“ Strange, she gave us rendezvous here, rather than at her palazzo ! ”

“ I told you she has a surly husband who favours not troveres,” replied Arnaud, praying that Louis would cease questioning, lest Jehanne should give different answers to him when she came.

But just then the door opened, and a tall woman clad like some well-to-do burgheress in dark green stuff, with a dainty silken hood, entered ; a slender man in brown suit and wine-hued mantle and chapeau accompanied her.

Both were masked.

"She comes," said Arnaud, as they advanced.

"Welcome, Messire Arnaud," said the lady, and her voice was a tantalizing delight. "I am glad you have brought your friend. My escort is well known to you."

"'Tis but I, Giovanni," said the voice of Boccaccio, and showed a flash of white teeth below the mask-lace. "Madonna Forcalquier was good enough to bring me to hear the nightingale."

"See to what shifts a poor dame with a song-deaf husband is put," laughed Arnaud, with a look full of meaning at her. "Madame de Forcalquier, this is my good friend, Messire Vivien de Chartres—whom I think Orpheus disguised."

"My friend Arnaud, as he states that I am Orpheus, is Ananias—undisguised," laughed Louis bowing over her white hand. "You love our craft, Madonna?" he added, in Provençal.

"Certes, I do, it is my chiefest joy," she replied, seating herself at the table opposite to him, as he sat with his back to the wall. Arnaud and Boccaccio faced each other at the sides.

"You did not sing at the Court to-day, messire. Why?"

Louis eyed her curiously, but her mask was close, and only the eyes shone out, starry, mysterious, and provoking.

"Because I am unknown here, and because I felt unworthy to sing before the Queen," said he bluntly. "I had made a canzone to her which I intended singing, but when I saw her for the first time, I knew it for useless—as are most other songs to her!"

“O, hear the wretch!” mocked Arnaud. “He unworthy! Why, I am but a screeching crow beside him! Sing, Vivien, and let Madame hear if you do not lie!”

“Why, then, had you no other lady to uphold?” asked she, and Louis saw her fingers playing jerkily with her mantle edge. What was it to her?

A sudden whiff of suspicion blazed in his mind. He sought Arnaud’s face with quick, questioning eyes—and the trovere’s did not meet his—he moved nervously on his seat.

“No! I had no other lady,” he replied curtly.

“Domeniddio!” laughed Boccaccio in his genial way. “There can be but one reading to that. A glorious trovere—has never seen our Queen—has no lady— And henceforth—has but one lady! Eh, surety!”

Her hands clasped each other, ivory-white on the oaken table’s surface; then she shrugged and tossed her head till Louis saw the crimson of her lips under the lace. Quickly he leaned forward, but she laughed and dipped her chin low, with an arch flash of her eyes.

“O—the Queen! We all know she is Venus!” she said scornfully.

“Sing to me, messire—aught you please.”

Arnaud passed Louis his vielle and he sang, but only a short stanza or two in Provençal.

“Drech è rason es qu’you kanti d’Amour!
Vezent qu’you ay ja consumat mon agi,
A l’y complaire e feruir nuech è iour,
Sens aver d’el profiech ny avantagi!”

(“Rightly should I sing to you of Love, so do you stir me thereto. To please you would I strive night and day—yet without profit or result.”)

Simple words, yet as the golden notes soared aloft, lark-like and joyous, a visible tremor ran through the slender, green figure. She raised one hand to unmask, and then stopped suddenly as three or four *cittadini* seeking a supper-room looked in at the door.

However, at Louis's quick glare, and checked *vielle*, they hastily departed, and then impulsively she clapped her hands.

"Messire, you are indeed Orpheus! I must hear you again! Ha, friend Arnaud, were I a man, I would embrace you for your discovery!"

"No reason against it even thus—seeing the *Sieur Forcalquier* is absent, and your mask present!" laughed Boccaccio in high holiday humour, which was infectious.

She sprang up, laughed, and held out her arms to Arnaud, who jestingly pretended to clasp her a moment. Then she gave both hands to Louis, who did not at once release them. Strange, quick thrills shot through both as their fingers met, and he gazed hard at the baffling mask, guessing—almost certain by this.

"Sing again for me!" she commanded, reseating herself.

But he laughed. "Not unless you promise me somewhat, madonna."

"O fie! Bargainer!" from Boccaccio. "Nightingales should sing for joy alone."

"A nightingale likes to look at the Moon Goddess. So do I. If she will uncloud herself but a second, then I will sing the night long."

Giovanni touched her foot warningly under the table, but she was in no mood for the hint. From what she had previously told him of her strange

vision, something may be guessed of the feelings which the actual presence of Louis set astir within her, and the very fantasticness of her disguise, and this tavern adventure put the finishing touch to her high excitement. Just then she felt capable of any rash, joyous folly, and Boccaccio knowing it, was in a fever; lest any should find out this escapade and his own share in it. Arnaud he trusted, but the stranger—He found a chance to get her fingers under the table and whisper—

“Caution cara—no unmasking!”

“Needless! Besides I will have a merry night for once,” she whispered back. Then aloud to Louis. “Sing, Orpheus! I will accede to your request.”

Louis took the *vielle* and started a *canzone*. She watched with delight the brave picture he made against the dark panelled wall, the lamplight glowing bright upon his splendid frame, touching up the fires in his ruddy hair, and sword hilt, and chain.

Her ears were captive to his marvellous voice’s spell again, but before the first verse ended the door opened to admit three men, calling the host for wine.

Suddenly a fierce oath broke from one.

“Ha, Ladislaus! The fellow who tried to brain me at the inn! Draw, lads!” It was Conrad the Wolf, Mikel Vardag, and the Ban of Croatia’s young brother George.

Louis instantly had recognised them, but never broke melody for that, only singing on instead of the *canzone*’s words in *Langued’Oc*:

“Cometh the foe—O take the lady hence now, brothers mine!”

But the Wolf advanced, hand on hilt.

"Now, dog! What do you here?" he growled.

Louis thrummed on calmly, but stopped singing to ask, puzzled, of Mikel Vardag:

"Is the seigneur mad? What means he?" and sat there behind the table touching the *vielle* strings lightly with easy fingers, even as the Wolf lugged out his sword.

As he advanced, Jehanne sprang up and threw herself forward, her arms wide apart.

"Halt, there! No brawling here!" she cried, command in the words.

"Hallo! His damsel again interferes!" said Conrad, grimly amused. "Not so fast this time, gay bird. Hoch! Unhood, merlin mine."

He snatched at her hood, but could not get it off.

"Hola, brigand!" from Arnaud, lunging at him with his sword.

But the Wolf's blade twisted under the trovere's, and with that peculiar wrist-bend known to fencers, sent it flying across the room. Then he turned on Louis, whose hilt caught one instant in the table-edge, but that fatal instant Jehanne saved. Just as Arnaud's blade flew wide, she ripped out Boccaccio's sword, and quick as a star falls, she lunged at Conrad, getting the point in, just at the base of his throat so that it glanced upwards from the mail plate he wore under his *cotte hardie*.

Quick blood showed, and the Wolf staggering backwards tripped on a chair and fell against Mikel, into whom Arnaud, weaponless but for his *poignard*, suddenly charged, butting head downwards like some Alpine goat, shutting him up in the middle!

Jehanne's action had been so quick that Giovanni had only been able to gasp, but now his nimble wit returned, and with a sweep he had the lamp off the table just as Louis got from behind it, and with ready foot tripped up young George, who had dashed for Jehanne.

Giovanni had wanted to plunge the place in darkness, and escape thus, but a lamp by the wall remained, and next instant he got at it, and blew it out, just as George toppled on to Mikel and Conrad, and before they could sort themselves, Louis had advanced to snatch up Jehanne and rush with her for the door, hastily saying :

“Forgive me, madonna,”—when, as she turned, her mask loosened by the Wolf's clutch, fell, and in that second he saw that it had indeed hidden the face of Queen Jehanne !

He saw this just as Giovanni extinguished the lamp, and in the pitch darkness he lifted her, and gaining the door set her safely down in the street without, ere any of the inn's folk were aware of aught amiss. Arnaud and Boccaccio were there equally quickly, and together they rushed up the Vico, and turned down a side street too promptly for any pursuit ; and indeed, it took the two Hungarians some minutes to gain the light and assist the wounded Conrad, so that it would have been useless.

“Heavens, madonna !” said Giovanni to Jehanne, as they picked their way down the narrow alley. “Well did I name you ‘Lightning of the World’ ! You shamed us by your speed there—and lo ! you even carry my sword yet in your hand.”

She laughed and handed it to him. As they reached

the alley end, giving on the Larga he held up a warning hand.

“Hist, there, a moment while we peer if the Larga be clear ! I marvel they have not tried pursuit——”

With Arnaud he stepped on to the open space, while Jehanne and Louis waited in a convenient doorway’s shadow, and once there she breathed deeply and said :

“Ah, messire ! For once I knew a man’s joy ! To be openly sword in hand at a foe’s throat—gladness indeed, despite the danger ; for I am on the side of the Neapolitans against their foes, even though I am of Provence.”

But Louis seemed not to hear this. A ray of moonlight fell between the high buildings and showed her face.

“‘Lightning of the World’ your escort calls you, madonna ?” he said very low. “Well,—henceforth the world holds for me no other Light !”

She stood there gazing hard at him, all thrilled with the strange emphasis he threw into the words, unable for the nonce to find a reply : she, Jehanne of the Golden Lips, mute thus ! As she wondered, he held up her mask he had secured somehow, as they dashed away.

“Would I might keep this, the cloud which once hid my Light ?” he said.

She hesitated a moment, doubtful if she could screen her face enough with the hood ; but assuming consent, he deliberately laid a hand on each of her shoulders, with quiet masterful touch, and held her so, just as one does a very young girl or child one knows very well, a short space.

Strange place and hour, his mood, and will, conquered all idea of rebuff. She smiled back in his eyes, and her lips parted with frank pleasure.

"I owe you my life, my mystic Amazon errant," he said, and threw into the phrase once again a world of meaning. "Thanks therefor I cannot offer you in poor words—but only in my life's service—time enough in the future for it. The others return, now and thus—Good-night, Madonna Forcalquier!" raising his voice as Arnaud and Boccaccio joined them and reported the coast clear.

"Have a care of her by the way!" he added merrily to Giovanni, and raised both her hands to his lips; but as he released them she turned sharply.

"But I must see you again!" she cried, carried away on a sudden; and he answered serenely, and even formally:

"When and where you will, my voice shall please you, madonna," and so went off with Arnaud.

Giovanni and Jehanne reached the garden postern of the Castel in safety, and he said, stooping to fit its key:

"In any case, carissima, you cannot this time complain you have had a dull night!"

She laughed softly as they entered, and he skipped joyfully across the garden beside her, brimful of relief at having safely landed his perilous charge home again.

"But I must have another such!" she cried, and catching his hand gaily danced a few steps of a pavane in the moonlight.

"And luckless I thought you would have had

enough such brawls ! ” cried he ruefully. “ For well you know, you fairy piper, that I must always dance to any mad tune you may please to whistle ! ”

And they gained the spiral stair unseen in the shadows.

CHAPTER XII

THE night after her adventure at the Tazza d'Oro, Jehanne was in her own room when her sister came in to her, and her brow showed a cloud of anxiety which made Jehanne wave Filippa from them and ask, as the door shut: "Cara, what is't?"

Marie sat down, and twisted her hands together. "Sister, I am afraid—there is much secret around us now. Know you aught of it? I had a hint from Aunt Catherine that plots weave. But she would not say more as yet."

"Nay, I am as dark as you," returned Jehanne. "But when was Naples ever without a plot of sorts? They brew, they break again—never care."

"Not such as this. Oh, Jehanne dearest, I am afraid—I feel that pits yawn about us. What if—we have to cede to Hungary?"

She was shaking, and Jehanne was half scornful, but hugged her protectingly. "Is this my brave Marie? Fie! Aide, aide, Anjou! I have no fear," she spurred, hiding the creeping doubts in her own soul.

"Oh, Jehanne, you have no child you fear for—no Charles—you know not——"

"No, but have I not grandsire's trust—Naples? What is my own life to that? Eh, scared bird! Keep you out of aught that comes up, an you fear!"

I know not what brews, but if it is for Naples's good I must join."

"But Charles——" She sank on a stool and laid her head on Jehanne's knee.

"Charles can guard himself, and I am not his keeper, sweetest."

"Jehanne, is it quite hopeless to make peace with Andrea? At times of late I have not blamed him so deep. 'Tis the friar and his men mostly."

"Art a child again to ask? I have done all I can. Go to bed, Marie—you must be weary to talk thus."

Marie kissed her silently, and flitted out. Before Jehanne could give her wonder and doubts rein, Filippa was back again, and arraying her in her white sendal tiring robe, began plaiting her splendour of hair into two long golden plaits.

A knock at the anteroom door sent in Sancia, very puzzled.

"Majesty, here is Friar Robert to speak with you. He will take no nay."

Jehanne swept into the anteroom followed by Filippa, but the friar frowned, and said curtly, ere she could speak:

"Pray dismiss your dame, daughter!"

Jehanne stared. "Wherefor? Yet stand just without the door, Filippa. Saints! What is amiss, Father, that you come so late?"

Abruptly he sat upon a blue velvet chair, and threw back his hood. His face was red, his hands picked nervously at his cordelier's knots.

"No pleasing errand!" he sniffed. "I come to censure yesterday's insolence to my master!"

She flushed with annoyance. To rouse her like a

naughty child for this ! “ What insolence ? And how dared you come thus ? ”

“ Softly, madonna. Yesterday your husband accompanied you for kindness to your giddy folly of Capua, and there you made him its mock, when he drowsed. My daughter, beware ! Even his kindly patience wears short. I say what he, too forbearing, will not. You must bend to his will, reform your pride, sue his forgiveness, wifely.”

“ Ha ! ” gasped she. “ You dare—— ? ” She looked about as if seeking a weapon.

He rose, strode towards her, his stumpy figure erect for once, his eyes glaring strangely. She recoiled, but before she reached the inner door he had her by the wrist and dimly she heard :

“ Hear, Queen ! Twice have you had warning of serious sort ; now comes a last caution ! You live in lightness, sinful folly, disobedience to Church and husband. Judgment is at hand ! Abate your sinful pride, sue Andrea for mercy while you have yet time. Yea, toss stiff your neck, lower not your proud head ! You are Queen, you are hemmed in by your guards, by your fine lovers, and wantons ! But in the hour of the wrath of Heaven, will one cleave to you ? Your throne totters—avert it by the strong prop I offer you, in your husband’s arms ! Consent to his crowning ! Let word go to Hungary to-morrow, and so save your fall—which comes else ! ”

She rubbed her eyes with the hand she had wrenched free. Incredible insolence ! Eh, this horrible little brown-frocked wretch ! Her anger surged, and she did what maddened him worse than any blow—stretched her arms above her head sleepily.

“ And ’twas for this fine tirade you kept me from

rest ? You might have spared yourself, Father. My barons act for me. I cannot change my mind every day, and can do no more for the Prince than I have done already. Leave me now ; I am tired."

He lost all prudence, and with an ugly scowl, shook his fist at her.

"So be it ! You flout my advice, you defy heaven ! Beware, Lot's wife ! Sodom and Gomorrah flaunted in their day ! Repent !"

With a bound he was out of the door, leaving her standing stricken still as the Pillar of Salt of his insolent comparison.

She found her voice to tell Filippa to go away to rest, and then every vestige of sleepiness driven far from her, she knelt by the window thinking in a whirl.

She had defied the friar, but her alarm was rampant, her suspicions confirmed. So Marie's instinctive forebodings were right ! A counter-plot to the Empress's hinted one was afoot too. The friar had drawn the shroud from the skeleton of open defiance, and it waved its bony hands actively *menaçant* at her. Andrea's frothy spleen had never held half the venom that his minion's mien had held to-night. The memory of his rough grip on her wrist reddened her with shame in the dusk.

It brought her weakness home rudely, for, shear away the spell of her beauty, and awe that hedges a Queen, and what was she ? A weak woman—a toy who might be thrust into a convent—set aside ! Was that Andrea's intent ? Yet the friar, in his scathing spite, had told one truth at least, she thought bitterly. Which of her friends could she truly lean upon ? Which loved her, which her sceptre ? She went over

their list with a melancholy patience. Empress Catherine. Well, yes ; she loved her a little, else the long years of sympathy and caressing were lies. But as a strong arm, no stronger than her own ! No help there, in war. Duchess Agnes ? A soft purring kitten, frightened at a blow. Marie ? To-night had shown—mother-bird afraid for her chick ! Charles—ambition too strong for reliance. Robert and Philippe of Taranto ? Butterflies. Filippa, Sancia, Berto ? Dog's dumb, faithful love, no protection against Hungary's might. Sanseverino, Caracciolo, des Baux ? Lovers of the power of Anjou, not of herself, Jehanne. Marzano ? Ay, here was one faithful soul—and she smiled. But could he, and Cavaillon, yet another true man, ward off the brewing tempest ?

Then, Amaury ? Ah, here was most uncertainty ! His love ? O most balancing question ! Herself, or the crown ? Passion only, or true love of her soul ? If he it were who saved Naples now, what after ? He would take the reins, and while keeping her safe, be her master ! Dare she call on him, and risk this ? Then swiftly flitted up the face of Vivien de Chartres the trovere, and strange thrills therewith. He answered her question of Amaury in one swift word. No ! She feared the Red Count, but with a fear poles apart from that fear of man which springs from adoration in a woman's heart—one which hurt her pride to feel. Strong liking, not love for Amaury. Then hot behind came the thought : If this Vivien had been in his place ? He was but a trovere, she mused, but in no other man save in King Robert had she felt that sense of confidence, of sure knowledge of strong power. He was a man who might be king a man of steel, a sure defence. Why was he but a

singer ? Then dead King Robert's kindly old smile rose before her, and filled her eyes with tears. Ay, that was the truest love of her life, but she had it no more. He lay in Santa Chiara ; she was fighting her battles here. She longed for his counsel, his support, and choking sobs mastered her and drove back for the moment the image of the trovere, which had driven out Amaury's.

She knelt before Giotto's exquisite little picture of the Divine Mother, in her narrow oratory in the recess by the window.

"Mother of Mercy ! Holy Knower of Sorrows !" she prayed. "Thou who didst endure scorn of the world, slights of kinsfolk, terrors of flight—Thou seest my lone dreads. Send me aid or strength in myself to meet my enemies."

Then she sank forward, her head on the prie-dieu rail, and more wild thought ran riot in her mind. She never knew how long she knelt in that long meditation, wherein the thing which came oftenest was her unknown knight's memory. Bright moonlight flooded the room, making the shrine-light dim and low ; the night was very still, the whole Castel slept by now. She knelt on, occasionally breaking her vigil by a fresh murmur of prayer.

Then suddenly she raised her head and listened intently. In the stillness rose the Voice of her dreams, restrained from its full soaring, yet every word crystal-clear, divinely sweet, each note flung upward a perfect rounded pearl of song. It stole into her soul and filled it with a peace like some weird old spell of a wizard's harp ; she knew then the inner meaning of the word en-charm, to sing away the senses, and it awoke in her a swift response to its witchery.

Roughly Englished the words ran :

“ High in Our Ladye’s diadem of stars,
My Love’s soul glowed like to the ruby’s fire.
To clasp her for a space behind earth’s bars
I wearied Mary with my high desire.

Then Heaven’s Queen inclined her glorious head—
Down fell my Ruby like a darting flame !
Then all my soul was stricken stiff with dread :
A churl had seized her, ere I could her claim !

Then with my sword I reft her from his hand—
But in that space, her brief earth-hour had flown !
Beside me but one moment might she stand,
Then soared aloft—Our Ladye claimed her own !”

Jehanne looked from the window, on the long white terrace, sentinelled by its tall marble statues, lighted only by the brilliant southern stars, but at first saw no one.

She knew she was safe to be unheard of any, for above her rooms were her ladies’, and rarely a night passed without a serenade for one of them. It was an etiquette with them never to look out for each other’s singers, as the gallant always sent a note to his fair one in the afternoon before, so as to prevent embarrassment and mistakes.

What magic sent her trovere thus to-night ? Had Our Ladye thus answered her prayer for aid ? She leaned from the window panting, thrilling with fierce excitement, straining eyes, ears, to see him—but the dusk veiled the terrace.

Then what had seemed one of the statues wrapped in a grey mantle, like the colour of the others, stepped from the balcony, and advanced close below the window. Quite low, but thrilling with irresistible command, came two lines :

“ Viene da me !
Io te attende !”

Madness caught her suddenly as a gale of wind. She must see, speak with him now, at all risks. Last night she had felt his strange glamour over her—to-night it called her with strong voice, and she must go. She never halted to reason, but thrust her feet into her silver slippers, and gathered the white robe about her.

She was quite alone, for Filippa's room lay beyond the antechamber, and the head of the spiral stair which wound down to the Chapel was in a small empty room next to it. From the Chapel she would pass into the deserted Audience Sala, whose long windows led on to the terrace.

Cat-like silent, she felt her way in the dark down the spiral, and undid the Sala window-catch equally noiselessly. The shallow steps brought her out upon the terrace.

The tall grey figure came up and, wordless, took both her hands in a clasp which set every pulse a-thrill.

"How dared you come here? Wherefor?" she faltered awkwardly.

"How?—eh? I called the Queen's soul, not her Majesty—and I came as the wind does—over all barriers," he answered with the ease of a prince in the tone. She caught at this.

"Santissima Maria! You are no simple trovere! Who are you, that have wizardry to bring me down hither? Man or sprite?"

He laughed. "So asked sweet Psyche one other night long ago, but I am not Eros; and when Psyche knew him the discovery was fatal. Take warning!"

"I must know——"

"Sith you will, my name is Louis, a knight of

France, and if you set store by the like, my folk sat at Charlemagne's table——"

"Why called you thus?" she cut him short, her surge of emotion dazing her sharper reason.

Then came the most incredible climax, swift, fierce, unmatched in stories of man's audacity. He drew her into his arms, raised her unresisting mouth, and kissed her with a kiss which seemed to draw her soul through her lips, fiercely, surely, as the hot sunrays draw to themselves a rose's dew!

"There is but one way of reaching the stars," he said calmly, as a response at vespers. "So I climbed up—thus! For this I came, and—you cannot be angry. Ay, try!" He was magnificent in his assurance.

She drew away from him, slowly, quivering from brow to feet, yet truly anger was weakest of the senses swaying her, ere the bond of passive stupefaction snapped.

She hid her face in her hands, tumult raging. O insanity! Mad dream! She, Jehanne of Naples, standing there in the night, enduring mute as a lily a strange knight's victorious kiss! And yet—he was the man of her Vision, the conqueror then, as now!

He had thrown back his hood, and the moon, come from its cloud, showed the features she had pictured, the masterful gleam in the sea-hued eyes, the proud, half-scornful smile.

She stood with nervously locked hands, the inward storm blowing wilder with every slipping second of that silence, its gusts tossing her resolves, her scruples, hither and thither.

"I will leave you now," he said simply, and turned as if to go.

She snatched at this most skilful lure even as he had hoped.

“No! no! Stay! I must speak more with you. Know you what you have done? You have kissed me—Me—Jehanne, the Queen! Nay, nay! Stand back! Wizard! You have glamourèd me! Ah!—”

He had her again upon his heart, and this time her head sank helplessly upon his shoulder as she stammered out, hearing her own words dully as through some closed door:

“Oh, I am possessed—bewitched! Let me go!”

He clasped her only the closer, saying low and fast:

“Nay, my beloved, it is well. You are my Star, and I have climbed to you for the moment of the song. You in your soul resist me not, for when twin spirits meet in Paradise they know each other, as I knew you at Capua—ay, and as you guessed me, last night! Be honest, adored! You know! Yet fear not; you run no danger, for to-morrow I ride hence. . . . But to-night, this hour is ours!”

Again there was that brooding silence, and then Jehanne spoke, very rapidly:

“Beloved! Are you man or spirit to thus force my whole will, my whole pride from me? Seigneur! Why speak of love to me, who must forswear it? To one chained as I was, ere I knew by my grandsire, by my state—bound—set high upon a throne of ice!—’tis cruel—cruel! Ah, why have you come?—more pain for us both to know—to part—to suffer. It is wrong—wrong——”

But while she desperately called reason, recusant pride, to aid, love was mounting the inner barriers of her soul, and Louis’s next argument hoisted the immortal archer the higher to the attack.

"Such bonds as yours man sanctified, not right, nor love! I have naught to do with such world-ties, for I only seek your soul's true reply to mine now. Kings are not immortal! I adore you! Say thus also!" He held out both hands, and as one drawn by a magnet she put hers into them, and stayed thus one thrilling space wherein she felt his strange glamour fast melting the last icicle of her prudence, and then boldly and deliberately she linked her arm through his and drew him to a marble bench in the deeper shadow by the wall. She would have her hour, taste joy now, if the Castel fell upon her for it afterwards, she told herself recklessly. Then, as in her strange dream his lips met hers, and a fierce joy blotted out the whole world. . . .

It was an hour later when she lifted her head from his shoulder and asked, as one waking from a trance, a puzzled question:

"Beloved, what meant you by the immortality of kings? You are not of my Council; yet they, too, hint ever thus of late—ha, saints! It spreads a plotting net to snare me to—my freedom," she said strangely.

But his reply came steadily and with open truth in the tone.

"No, dearest! I know naught of any inner statecraft touching it. Only very certainly, the hot hate of a city is like to throw down a tryant. My Ruby of the Star, why mar this sweet hour by this? Think only now, that our spirits are one despite the grasp of the churl. His rough clasp may indeed part the torches of our bodies, but their flames, our souls soar high, and mingle in the air despite him!"

She smiled up at him radiantly, absolutely careless of aught but the moment's utter bliss.

"My Louis, yea! I will not remember the dawn till I must! Only tell me again—the blessed divine truth: You love me—love me!—love me!"

And so they sat entranced, heart to heart, with voices that mingled softly, and pulses that beat enchanted measures together, till the dawn's fingertips crept up to extinguish the star's faint burning lamps.

Boccaccio's foreboding had come true; Queen Jehanne's soul was awake at last!

CHAPTER XIII

“ Criaud des mains, la paix aux bandes et aux troupes
Mais fichant cependant les armes sur les poutres.”
NOSTRADAMUS.

JEHANNE had no clear memories of how she staggered up the spiral stair to her room, after Louis had kissed her a lingering farewell, and left her standing by the long terrace window.

Her endurance snapped as she reached her room, and she fainted dead away, fortunately on her bed, so that Sancia, coming in early, thought her asleep.

Then she roused herself to the new day and calmer thought.

Santa Chiara ! Had it not been for a plain gold ring on the chain round her neck with “ *Toujours* ” engraved on it, she could almost have thought it all a wild dream. But it was true——

Her knight ! Her longed-for, splendid knight ! Beside him Amaury seemed a dangerous condottiero, the others silken popinjays !

What though he had bidden her farewell now ? He would come back—he must ; and meanwhile she had him in the spirit always with her—she could revive in her soul their wonderful hour together, recall the magic of his voice, his touch, his strange conquering power.

Thus she thought ignorantly, not guessing as yet

that his loss would, with time, like an untended wound, gape wider and set hard till it would be agony at last.

His memory strengthened her courage, her resolve to cede nothing more to her foes—blotted the thought of the friar's threat a little. Perhaps things were not so grave, perhaps——

Then as the thought of Andrea struck her sharply, she buried her face in the pillow, twisting her hands together in keenest pain.

Her husband ! That clod, that dolt was bound to her by law and church ! He held her honour captive—he barred her from her Knight !

She could not face the thought, the fact which she had resolutely thrust aside last night, when she had snatched her hour of joy. So she called Filippa hastily to dress her, and distract her thoughts from the maddening round whereon they ran. But the quick leaps of her heart kept turning her cheeks alternate white and scarlet. But resolutely she checked her musing.

Presently came Ithamar of Argos from the Empress, asking Jehanne to come across to Palazzo di Taranto, to examine and choose from some embroideries sent from Constantinople ; Jehanne wondered why she had not sent them over to Castel Nuovo, but guessing at more behind, dismissed Ithamar with an assent.

Jehanne let Filippa put on her morning gown of pale green velvet, with silver rope-girdle, broke her fast on frittura of fish and bread, with a draught of Cyprian wine, and then sauntered across the sunny square to the Imperial Palazzo with its splendid marble façade, and its carvings of dancing fauns, and linked laurel festoons.

Empress Catherine lounged upon a wide Eastern couch, clad in soft white sendal, with violet at hem and throat, holding a small tambour frame with idle fingers. She stared at the wall, frescoed (curiously enough) with pictures of Deborah dancing before Israel with her timbrel, faultlessly attired in Italian costume of the day.

Great thoughts turned in Catherine's keen mind, as she thought of the hurried council held on the dark Bay, by night.

It had been the strangest of conferences, but none the less deadly because velvet had partly masked its steel.

Firstly Amaury, supported at need by Bertrand, had laid the impending danger before them, and declared that something must be done at once. For his part, he suggested that Andrea should be seized quietly, and hurried off to Altamura and kept there during the Queen's pleasure, or until he agreed to reign quietly as Prince Consort only.

This Marzano heard with a frown, the brothers Artois and Sanseverino with angry denunciations of Hungary. Filippa and Sancia had said nothing but their minds worked faster than mills.

The meeting grew hotter—sword-hilts were clutched angry oaths ran low and fierce. Then some one (Catherine could not catch who) let fly the prisoned thought-vulture: "Kill the rat and make safe!"

No one at first replied, but none contradicted it, for they were (as Amaury had foreseen) all very closely of a mind.

It was like a deadly game of chess with veiled pawns, close veiled as yet, for each felt that after Andrea's removal they would have time for all their moves among each other's squares.

The Empress's pawn was Prince Robert, Bertrand's the County of Provence, Terlizzi's avarice, Marzano's, the only honest one, pure patriotism, Amaury's the crown, and all the rest their own ennoblement to principalities.

No one for one moment believed Amaury's war-cry of simple patriotism, but none said so, for they were glad of him as temporary ringleader. Marzano mistrusted him most perhaps, but the wary old warrior resolved to use him now, and afterwards, should he be dangerously presumptuous, a quarrel with him was easily picked.

"See here, lords!" growled Terlizzi in his surly way. "If we do shut him up he will be for ever a jack-in-the-box, rising always awkwardly! Fever is bad enough in Autumn!"

"No, no! We are not snakes, Terlizzi!" said Amaury, cunning as Lucifer.

"Cannot we contrive to have him commit high treason and undergo a formal trial?" said the Empress.

"Highness, your wisdom is great," said Amaury. "But when the highest Courts had condemned him you forget that the Queen's too gentle spirit might prompt her to revoke the sentence. Yet imprisonment seems the one way—for if we banish him, He will go plotting vengeance in all the corners of the earth!"

"We should have Hungary thundering at Altamura, if it leaked where we had him," said Sanseverino. "And then what? European intervention sought by Ludwig, and the Queen forced to free him. No, comrades!"

"One point you all forget!" said Bertrand des

Baux abruptly. "We must have the Queen's authorisation ere we do anything whatever! She must give us leave to—er—imprison him, first, and by degrees we can go—farther. Till we have her views we must do no more. I look to the Empress to persuade her that it is for the general good!"

"Leave her to me!" said Catherine, drawing her cloak closer, and shivering slightly, for the breeze was fresh and the felucca plunging heavily. So the conspiracy put to land again, each member of it feeling he could do no more that night.

Yet as Catherine waited Jehanne's coming next morning, her brows were knitted. Robert, her vain, courteous, good-looking son, had never seemed so unlikely a tool before! Would Jehanne, once freed from her irksome bonds of Andrea, listen to his vapid suit in any hurry. The Red Count was in the field felt Catherine, and dangerous as he was, still a most desirable ally, a sure sword against Hungary. Ah well, she must let him act now, and afterwards when the work was done, Andrea removed, the kingdom saved, she could compass some fall for him, and thus leave Jehanne free, and to be completely swayed by herself. She would then have her ambition of being *de facto* if not *de jure* ruler of Naples, Provence and the two Sicilies! Ah, why had Robert not got his brother Louis's fascinating personality, without his dangerously strong will? Louis as King would be no use whatever to his too-loving mother! He would be incorruptible, immovably just, not to be swayed by any influence at all. Better no king-nominal at all than he! Luckily he was safe in Taranto, and abjured Naples, and all the others, from Marzano to Filippa, were easily handled either by Jehanne or her-

self. So that the Empress was smiling again by the time Jehanne entered, bringing with her a wave of sweet fresh morning air. Her step was lighter, her bearing gayer than it had been for long.

Catherine carefully unfolded to her what Guy had overheard; she spoke also of the meeting they had held, and its resolution to imprison Andrea, but to her aunt's surprise and relief Jehanne heard it calmly.

"Hear you my tale now, Aunt! Yours explains what the friar meant!"

She related the friar's insolence, and her reply to him, but somehow, even while she spoke on so serious a theme, she kept herself scarce moved by it. Her hidden joy, her precious secret glowed so warm within her, that it made all ordinary troubles seem unreal—far away.

Ten minutes silence fell between them. Catherine broke it by—

"Well, what of my tidings? Ma chérie, your time is scanty, King Ludwig's messenger may come any day. What will you reply to the barons? You know what hangs at stake."

But Jehanne was musing dreamily.

"I ponder much, Aunt. Is there no other way? This one means war, and all its terrors most certainly, and then I dislike the method—it seems ignoble——"

"You will dislike things still more, an you act not!" said Catherine very tartly. "You are not alone in the matter either—consider your people under these Hunnish demons' yoke! Wake up! (What ails the girl? Dreamy shilly-shally is not like her at all!)"

“Can we trust all our men?” said Jehanne, deep consideration in her eyes, “I fear Savoy for some things. Yet I know we must act—the friar’s insolence was warning enough. But oh, how I dislike consenting—I——”

Her conscience was pricking her deeper than ever, because she felt that Louis’s influence urged her against Andrea, and raised a new scruple which her honour fought.

“I, too, doubt Savoy,” said Catherine. “Yet he is indispensable in this crisis. He is trusted of both the Council and the soldiers—we must let him help us—come, Jehanne—you must consent. One would think ’twas for Andrea’s head they asked you to sign. It is only to have him quietly seized and clapped into Altamura one night. Then we will banish his rascally minister the friar, and Conrad Wolf’s troop, and when Andrea comes to his senses we can restore him to his Duchy of Calabria, and he can be a quiet figure at your Councils. But you will be your own mistress again, for ever! Come! Decide!”

Jehanne still hesitated, weighing matters in her mind, trying to grasp the future—the consequences, the riot which would follow her assent. She suddenly saw the expression in her aunt’s eyes, and strange doubts pricked her, but she had no time to meditate.

The room they occupied was on the piano nobile of Palazzo di Taranto, and two of its marble-balconied windows overlooked the square between it and Castel Nuovo. From the great square rose many mingled sounds, tramp of horses, gruff commands, running feet, doors banging afar off, voices accumulating into a steady hum—ending in the sharp blare of a trumpet, too urgent to be disregarded longer. In their dis-

cussion they had not noted the beginning of the noise, but before Jehanne could reach the window Filippa rushed in, her usual stern calm broken, her thin lipped mouth babbling with haste to get the words out.

“Highnesses, the end has come! We are defeated—lost!”

Sending rank to the winds, she caught an arm of Empress and Queen, and fairly dragged them to the window, where they stood gasping.

Half Naples was met in the Larga—the space before Porta Reale was lined into a smaller square with the men of Conrad Wolf and Nicholas Ungaro. On the very drawbridge of the Porta sat on his white destrier, Andrea, and around him on bridge and square every Hungarian in the kingdom. Friar Robert held his rein, the Ban of Croatia his helm on a cushion, like a crown, and Niccolo di Milazzo, his Italian notary, was reading loudly from a document. Fragments drifted up clearly.

“Andrea, by the grace of God, King of this realm, here already proclaimed, summons all knights, barons, and nobles, to attend on the morrow to do him homage——”

“Eh, by the Blood!” swore Filippa in a wild whisper, “King—he!”

It broke the horror which held Jehanne. Before Catherine could stop her she was out on the balcony.

But for Niccolo’s reading the Larga was quiet, the crowd listening in anxious silence. Out rang Jehanne’s tones, clear and strong as a clarion over a jay’s gabble.

“Andrea, by the grace of Hungary, King! But by

the grace of God and of Anjou, Duke of Calabria and Prince of Salerno only ! Duke of Calabria, you have committed high treason ! ”

The effect was electric. Every head turned to the balcony. There stood their Queen, her hand outstretched, her head thrown back in haughty anger. The situation was tense with fate. Friar Robert said something, and Andrea pointed to the window with his sword.

“ Neapolitans, the Queen is mad ! She knows I am King henceforth—Herald, read on ! ”

“ People of Naples, am I so mad as to let a foreign yoke fall upon you ? The Duke usurps my power and your liberties ! Naples ! Provence ! Will you let Hungary triumph over you, resistless ? ”

But there was hardly a Provençal or Neapolitan soldier present, and only a few of the Court who had flown thither as the news ran.

The whole *coup d'état* had been excellently planned.

Unsuspectingly, Bertrand des Baux had taken his troop exercising to Pozzuoli, and upon the Queen's Guard in their Castel Nuovo quarters, the key of its gate had been turned. Their shouts and hammerings to break out were even now audible on the Larga.

So soon as the messenger from King Ludwig rode in, the Prince had rallied his men and seized the Larga, and the Queen's barons were taken unawares. Had Jehanne not been with the Empress she would have been prisoner in her own room. Where, oh, where was Amaury ? Marzano ?

But the citizens were moving again, once the first shock worn off. For a moment they hesitated as Jehanne appealed, then the roar went up—

“ Giovanna ! Nostra Giovanna ! Regina nostra !

Sempre Giovanna ! Accidenti ai Ungheresi ! A basso i traditori ! ”

They pressed forward against the Hungarian horse, brandishing sticks, daggers. Andrea grew white with anger. Was the woman a witch to sway them thus ?

“ Down with disloyal beasts ! ” he cried. “ Conrad, disperse the crowd ! ”

The line of Hungarian lances dropped and advanced.

Women shrieked, children bawled, but the men’s blood was up. They were citizens and disorganised, but they were the fierce men of Naples, and their pride held them stiff. In one moment the audience was an army, the Larga a raging battlefield.

Jehanne’s dismayed cry at seeing her people ridden down was lost in the tumult. She stood blankly raging, all a-fire, craving one thing only, to be down there, sword in hand herself, to get at the treacherous throats which had stolen her kingdom.

As she stood fearfully fascinated, watching, the door of the room behind her was splintered open. Filippa and the Empress screamed, and a brutal hand dragged her forcibly from the balcony. It was the Ban of Wallachia, all the veneer gone, all the smothered hate uncovered.

“ Stop your speeches, Madame ! ” he said roughly, still grasping her. “ You must no longer inflame the people against their King ! ”

“ You unbounded ruffian ! ” thundered the Empress. “ Let go of the Queen ! By St. George you shall pay for this—you Magyar brute ! ”

Jehanne twisted herself free, then faced him with a mien at which even he quailed.

“ You have dared ! ” she said, but without raising

her voice. "Go! You have no right here! This is the Empress of Constantinople! Will France and the the Empire, her relations, overlook your insolence to her, whatever betides me? Go!"

A terrific yell rent the air. The Ban strode to the window, exclaimed, and rushed away as he had come.

Count Amaury at head of five hundred Savoyards had ridden from a street end, and charged the enemy. Seeing this, Andrea's trumpets rang truce, and he advanced to parley, but ere they could speak another cry rose—

"Au hasard!
Balthasar!"

and the burly figure of Hugues des Baux, heading another hastily gathered force, pushed from another street.

Roger Sanseverino, sprung from fate knows where, leaped on the Larga's high fountain, adroitly turning off the water, yet getting drenched withal.

"Neapolitans make no truce with those who insult their Queen. Where is she? Hasten into the Palazzo! She may be dead by yon fiend's hands by now!"

The mob with one movement besieged the main gate with hasty impotence. Seeing their beloved Queen in the Ban's hands had carried away the last rags of their patience. Amaury forced his destrier through the press to the window of an anteroom, where cowered a scared servant.

"Open—the side postern—'tis I, Savoy!" he said, and was obeyed.

The pounding on the gate went on in fitful bursts, yells and curses rose ever louder. The Hungarians

had withdrawn across the Larga, and waited while Andrea cursed and fumed.

"Eh, by St. Anna! They'll flay the Ban alive if they catch him," said Friar Robert.

Andrea swore.

"What reck's that, so long as we catch her?"

Amaury had dashed into the room where Jehanne silently waited the end.

"Oh, if we could but have been warned of this proclamation!" he cried.

Jehanne flung up her head, fiercely frowning.

"I will defy him to the last now! He stole my right—I must save my people——"

But a light had flashed back to Amaury's mind, and showed him a desperate way.

"No, my Queen! He shall never hold your sceptre, but you must trick him into thinking so, to gain time! Trust me! I implore you—act quickly. Cry now to the people that you will see the Prince and arrange matters, then in the Council give sanction to his being crowned!"

A terrific cheer rose as the gate broke, and the mob streamed up the stairs, demanding the Queen. The splintered room-door filled with faces, and a great, burly fruit-seller spoke eagerly.

"Most glorious Majesty, are you safe? Tell us that the devils have not harmed you——"

Jehanne turned.

"Yea, I am safe—safe!" though her voice shook slightly. "I can see from his actions that the Prince is distraught. Give me time and I will arrange matters to satisfy all. My brave men, I thank you—You show me that I can indeed rely upon my people in time of need!"

Cheers went up. She stepped from the balcony and repeated the words, but their effect was even more amazing than that of her previous speech.

Andrea rose in his saddle and shouted :

“ Neapolitans, the Queen is no longer in power to make arrangements ! Heed not.”

“ No ! ” yelled Roger Sanseverino. “ Then, be it our task to make them ! To me Naples ! Charge the dogs ! ” brandishing his sword.

“ Au hasard ! Balthasar ! ” boomed Des Baux’s deep note.

The lance points dropped, the mob rushed, when suddenly the friar whispered to the Prince, who sheathed his blade and screamed out—

“ Hold ! The Queen shall do whatever she wills ! No harm to her ! ”

But the mob jeered.

“ Keep then your word, you damned usurper ! ” cried a tall butcher, whose cleaver had done much damage. “ Touch her little finger, and we have your head ! No frightening her to humour your whimsies ! Take oath by San Gennaro’s blessed bones to keep troth ! ”

The situation was tense as a strung bow. Andrea saw his small force, Sanseverino, Des Baux’s troop, the swarming Larga. If they rushed he was lost now, and next week the ten thousand men and his brother would arrive. He could well afford to wait.

“ By San Gennaro I swear it ! ” he cried in his reedy scream. “ The Queen shall be free, and no hand of mine shall be laid on her ! ”

The Larga raised a last deafening shout, and Jehanne descended, mounted Amaury’s destrier and rode into

Porta Reale, her dress hem, her very steed's mane, kissed by a hundred adoring lips, as she went.

Jehanne found the next hour one long nightmare. She went to her rooms, while dire confusion reigned in the Castel.

Triumphant Andrea was closeted with his ministers ; the lesser fry of Conrad Wolf and company drank steadily to their King's health in their quarters. Amaury's conspirators were all there, yet dared not risk reunion, though he, Marzano and Sanseverino, did walk in the Council Hall awhile together, but even as they talked, a small cortège of six monks and a tall Abbot rode into the inner cortile on mules.

Filippa knocked at Jehanne's door.

"An envoy from the Holy Father—will you see him, cuore mia ?"

"Yes, but up here. I would be alone to read the letter."

She was sure a calamity impended, and dared risk no onlookers.

Ceremoniously the Abbot presented the Pope's letter, sealed in a silver tube, and withdrew to the antechamber. She waded through its weighty Latin, clasped her hands over her painful heart, and stood like a woman of stone.

Pope Clement had taken the Hungarian bribe, and now ordered "his dear daughter in Christ" to consent "for the good of her kingdom" to the coronation of "her dear lord and husband Andrea!" and ended with the item that the Papal Legate, Bishop Guillaume Amici of Chartres, would in a few days bring her the Holy Father's blessing and lay the crown upon the

Prince's head. The crown upon his head! King Robert's golden circle, which Americ de Chastelleux's hands had placed on her own brow! Never!

Then realising that to cry Never, was useless, when the Pope her last ally, had failed her, she stared with glazed eyes at the dumb walls.

News, in a palace, runs like fire through stubble.

Amaury, taking a letter as excuse, went up and found the Papal messenger with Filippa in the anteroom. She having gathered his mission from his too confident lips, was about to deny Amaury entrance, when Jehanne appeared at the inner door.

"My Chamberlain will attend to your comfort, Father—I will give you my reply later!" she said, and Filippa took the Abbot downstairs.

Wordless Jehanne gave Amaury the letter.

"All is lost," she said as he read it.

"No! All is saved! Oh, my Queen, can you not see that the Prince's folly has cut his own throat? After this morn's work, no one will question whatever you may do! The Empress told me hastily as we left her Palazzo that you knew of our conclave and agreed with us. You took me for your friend that blessed day in the harbour—trust me now and follow my counsel, for I see a way to save the Crown. Slay me if I err. We must lull our enemies into thinking themselves safe. This letter from the Pope is the very chance. Call the Council of State and tell them you have decided to concede the Crown to your husband. Show reluctance to hide deeper aims well, but cede. Then while his party are festively preparing for the crowning, we will pounce upon and carry him off to Altamura! You will then write to the Pope, go to him, if need be, and appeal to France for

aid, whose king I know certainly will give it. Des Baux, Marzano and I can keep order here.”

He knelt, and she searched him with a long gaze, but could only see her faithful servant in him. His face was eager but not passionate then. As she twined her hands nervously together the right wrist winced, as she felt still the bruise of the Ban’s rough grip.

Impetuously she held out both hands, and, as he pressed and kissed them, said :

“Santa Maria speed us all, brave friend ! Ay, I will do thus—for afterwards you can tell me more of the secret conclave. Go now, assemble the State Council ! ”

Amaury left the room, triumph singing in his ears.

Three miserable dark days were passed. Never till now had Jehanne realised how bitter the bread of humiliation can be, nor how keen the pangs of being unjustly judged—even when the bread be leavened by the fact that the humiliation is but assumed for a while ; at the moment it is quite as bad. It reached its bitterest when at the dismal gloom-stricken Council Cavaillon’s eyes turned from hers for the first time.

The white misery on the faces of the other lords, old and trusted of King Robert, or young and who had trusted in her, haunted her like accusing ghosts, as she pronounced the sentence which gave her rights to Hungary.

When the Council’s business was known, the town rioted turbulently, and street and soldiery brawls were common ; only the Court, faithful yet, kept

swords and tongues sheathed, while the boiars aired their new importance in the Castel. Though their Queen sold them, she was still their Queen, and when she said peace with Andrea's men, they followed suit loyally, even when their fingers itched to slap the foe's insolent cheeks. Besides, with a Southerner's quickness at a hint, they each noted the certain assured calm of the Des Baux and Savoy's manners, and bided their time. On the third day came another envoy from King Ludwig.

The siege of Zara was proving far longer than he had thought, and his brother's coronation was less urgent matter ; so that he kept his ten thousand men to finish Zara before proceeding to Naples. In this letter Ludwig took Jehanne's cession for granted, and even proposed the coronation's date as September 20, as the Papal Legate would arrive on the 18th, a week thence. If possible, he, Ludwig, would be there himself ; if not, he would come later, as the siege permitted. Andrea himself brought Jehanne the letter, and she nodded a dull assent to all he said, with the air of one who struggles no more. He was jubilantly talkative, like all vain persons hoisted on to a little eminence, and, mistaking her passive endurance for cowed submission, he went away well pleased with his victory.

But when Andrea had left her, her suppressed rage threatened to choke her, and even though the hour was that of the siesta, and the sun was hot, she craved for open air, free space. She had hardly dared think of her forbidden joy, Louis, since that fateful Council, but now his image rose willy nilly, and to banish it she bid Sancia take her wheel to the eastern gardens,

and then sent her within to sleep the noon-slumber of the South.

Close to the outer wall was a covered arbour of vines and some sweet-scented shrub from Greece, and in a tiny fountain-basin before it, a brilliant peacock was drinking.

Trusting to her wheel's hum to soothe her, Jehanne began to spin. She had vowed a processional banner to Santa Chiara's church, representing Our Ladye of Sorrows kneeling before Calvary, and as she was fain to do its every stitch herself, she now twisted the fine silk rope to hang it on its pole, and its purple silk and gold threads made a cord rather thicker than her middle finger.

Her idle fancy began to weave on ropes and their many uses. Hapless Arachne flitted into her vision, and Ulysses straining at his mast, Ixion on his wheel. She wound a strand round her own white wrists.

"Imperial purple, too!" she murmured, then smiled, as she thought of how as a tiny child Marzano had taught her upon his knee to make sailor's knots. She made one now, and found she remembered it perfectly.

Filippa came round the thicket edge, sheltered by a large fan, bearing her a snow-cooled drink, and she chid her affectionately for not sleeping, but smiled as she drank it.

Suddenly the Catanian picked up and examined the rope closely, and her fingers shook oddly a second. Jehanne asked her wherefore.

"Naught, carissima! I was thinking of Delilah the Philistine woman, and wondering if she twined

the rope for Samson—how she must have itched to put it close round his bull throat when he slept there !”

Jehanne laughed lightly. “What a queer thought, mama mia ! I, too, thought of ropes of olden times. Perchance she did not spin it herself, but took one from her camel’s gear—I marvel !”

Filippa stooped, kissed her cheek hotly, and left her with the words : “Make it strong, Jehannina ! The banner will be quite heavy !”

The wheel purred on, and a white dove joined the peacock’s drink.

The thicket rustled, but she knew that the steel chains of the two panthers who lived in it only reached to its edge, so paid no heed till the nearest boughs parted when the wheel stopped sharply.

There stood Louis, his hand caressing carelessly, as if it were on a cat’s, the head of one of the panthers, who usually set fiercely upon any but their keepers !

“Oh, why came you ? You may be seen—beware the panther also !” she cried in quick alarm. But the panther purred as he stroked it, well pleased.

“Nay, she loves me,” he answered easily. “And I came—because I could not stay away ! O, my Jehanne ! Could any mortal man and lover who saw as I did the scene of Palazzo di Taranto—you in your foe’s hands—do else ? I had resolved firmly to go hence, and see you no more—till we are free—I was going the morning after the proclamation day, but after I saw it I could not go ! My sword was loose, my hand aching to be on your worst foe ; yet

when things are—as they are—between us, I knew it for sin, and held back. The blood of the churl would stain my Ruby from the Virgin's crown ! Yet I came to say farewell, now, ere I go."

" Ah, Louis ! Know you not that my throne falls now ? I am a shame to Anjou, to Naples, for I have been forced to cede my rights to my enemies—unless a desperate stroke saves me, I am a toy for them ! Ah, why did you come ? You made me shrink from the death which threatens me, whereas before the other night on the terrace—I almost welcomed it ! "

They stepped into the arbour and sat upon a bench. Louis was strangely calm, Jehanne trembling violently. She broke out suddenly :

" Louis, I am driven to the last point of despair ! True, the law of man binds me here prisoner, but my spirit breaks all bonds of man now. I love thee more than aught else—ay, more than my soul ! Take me hence, Louis—lest I do a worse thing ! My barons tempt me to seek freedom, in a measure, by capturing Andrea and regaining my rights as Queen ; but what then ? If I must sit alone, bound upon my throne, for years—— Love has driven me mad, methinks—I feel as if I must run from my realm, a screaming, distraught thing ! Aid me, help me. Ah——" She ended in a moan and sank in his arms. Gently he raised her head, and looked her steadily in her tormented eyes.

" Nay, now, comfort thee, beloved ! The other night I forgot one thing which I had heard. I heard (in San Gennaro one morn) Andrea's friar and the Archbishop Orsini, and from what they said knew, that

King Ludwig means war, and, whate'er betides, he will try to make Naples but a fief of Hungary. Now, will the fierce Neapolitans bear this? In cool reason, tell me, how long has any hated tyrant ever worn Naples' crown? Any common knife may set thee free—and though neither thou nor I may in honour lift one finger thereto, we cannot but see what comes. Courage! High heaven knows that we twain sin not in our love now, but even to the world's eyes we must not seem so to do. I cannot tarnish my Star beloved! So thus I must go hence till thou art free!"

Her lips parted in quick ecstasy, and she sprang to her feet all a-glow with strange fires, and held out her hands in rapture.

Instantly his eyes kindled with the answering flame, and he kissed her lips till she gasped for breath.

"Jehanne, my Jehanne! Thou wilt be mine then!" he said, very low.

"If thou could'st only stay with me——" She clung to him. "I long for thy strong presence, thy love, thine aid every hour! How can I part with thee, my Louis? Nay, take me hence now——"

She stared wildly at the garden wall, as if it were a prison bound, her reason, her sense overwrought by the tempest within her.

But Louis understood, and very gently took up her hand with its gold ring, with its carven "A" and crown, with steady fingers.

"Nay, adorée, thou art now frenzied with trouble! Not till this lies no more on this little hand can I

come to thee ! Courage, courage, ma mie ! Then I shall come through the straight gate of honour—thy knight ! Be brave, my Jehanne—bear it a while longer ! ”

His self control, his calm reasoning, brought back her rioting sense to more level balance, and she smiled up at him trustfully.

He pleasured with her, to divert her, lover-like.

“ But will my Queen then crown her simple knight ? Thou see'st I am but a trovere —— ”

But indignantly she took him seriously.

“ Trovere or Emperor of the East, what care I ? Thou are my Louis, my love, and I could raise my knight to my throne if I would ! Why doubtest thou me ? ”

He smiled at her, with that irresistible smile he had, more with eyes than mouth, and kissed her forehead long.

Then the waning sunlight warned him that he must go, and he said :

“ I must hence, adorata mia ! Think on my words, trust me, and guard thy dear self well. I will not be far away, and at need can return. Kiss me, and let me go——”

She clung to him, her tears streaming, her sobs shaking her whole frame. Like some fretting child he hushed her with a child's device.

“ Now, now, ma mie ! I will not lengthen our parting thus—it is cruel for us both. Yet if thou wilt calm thee, I will sing thee a little song, and then go hence very quickly. 'Tis best thus, my Jehanne ! ”

He noted her wheel, and mused a moment or two, she meanwhile stifling her tears and watching his every movement, as if she would imprint his image the deeper on her memory. Then, with the trovere's ease, he improvised :

“ Link me a chain of stars
To bind my soul to thine !
Strong as that forged for Mars
By Vulcan, him t'entwine !

Spin me a rope of dreams
Blue, cloudy like spun smoke,
Frail, but as strong as seemed
Endymion's when he woke.

Twine me a crimson cord
Of passion's fibres red
Bonds whereof never sword
Can sunder e'en a thread.

Weave me a dark grey rope
Like the cords wherewith Death
Links to him those past hope,
Spun from his icy breath.

Twist me together three
Hairs of thy living gold.
They for my heart shall be
Rope which it ay shall hold !

This like the noose of Fate
Binds like her strong steel wire,
Faster than death or hate,
Knot of my High Desire ! ”

He sang low, for caution's sake, but the perfect magic of his voice absorbed her wholly for the moment and banished her active distress.

As the last note sank he clasped her hastily a moment, and found her stiff as a statue, even though she felt his heart beat and thrill her wildly. He stepped rapidly away, and she found her tongue as her grief rushed upon her.

“ Ah, Louis ! I shall be dead ere thou canst return ! ” she faltered.

But he went with one word, not daring to heed her entreaty.

“ No ! Courage, dearest heart ! When I return thou wilt be free ! ”

The outer garden wall was very high, and beyond it lay the moat, just now partly drained, but even so the fosse was too deep to scale from without.

Wondering, Jehanne walked quickly from the harbour, just in time to see him run along the battlement, speak to the sentinel, who took his great iron axed-headed, eight-foot halberd and laid it firmly against two of the battlement jags.

From under his cloak he drew a rope, and tying this to the weapon, Louis lowered himself into the deserted fosse.

She ran up the steps and confronted the sentry.

“ Who was that gentle ? ” she asked, dreading that the man would betray them.

He recognised the Queen and his jaw dropped.

“ Highness—Majesty—Madonna—I cannot tell,” he stammered ; but she stamped her foot sharply.

“ No harm will come to him ! Answer ! ”

“ Majesty, ’twas but a frolic—a young lord’s joke. He came after one of your noble damsels—he was my old seigneur——”

“ Ay—I know all about the damsel, but who is he ? ” holding up a gold coin.

“ Is’t possible your Majesty does not know her own royal cousin ? ’Tis Luigi, il Principe di Taranto, whom I have served ever since I could trail pike, till I came hither with the Empress a year ago.—I could

not refuse him a lift over a wall.—Ahi ! I humbly thank your most high Majesty ! ”

She walked back to the harbour, and sat there as if stunned.

Louis—her Louis—was Empress Catherine’s son !

CHAPTER XIV

LOUIS, after he left Jehanne, went towards Castel Capuana, his thoughts bordering on frenzy. He had suffered so much during the last few days that it began to tell, even upon his iron self-control.

Jehanne—Andrea, Himself ! It was a combination to drive him mad, yet when he added up the sundry signs of hatred of the Prince he heard on all sides, they formed a very sure total of his murder being attempted by some independent hand. Thus Louis's sound common sense naturally spoke comfort. He knew with the certainty of a great love that he need fear no rival with Jehanne then, and he felt that the joy which had come to him in a cloak of pain must soon cast it. He would fain have stayed near her till then, but honour bade him go, and he was going.

But then—ah—then ! Jehanne thought him only a simple knight, yet she loved him with her whole heart ! The world became Eden again, the stars sang above.

As he passed, he noted the sign of Vico Medina, and bethought him he would bid Marek the Tzigana farewell, and ask her to keep him posted in news of Jehanne in his absence. He knocked, and a woman with a scared look let him in, and presently took him to the gorgeous room wherein she had previously received him and Marguerite.

Marek lay on a divan, fury written on brow and mouth, her long hair unbound, her hands gripping with rage. His entry calmed her a moment like some lovely Hecate, lulled in her tempest.

"Forgive a stormy welcome, Messire de Chartres, but I am mad! I have just found out what maddens a woman worst in the world! I—oh——"

He sat beside her, sympathy radiating in his manner and took her hand.

"Tell me what is amiss," he said; and she, too furious for caution, trusted him.

"My lover spoke in his sleep words which told me all!" she said frantically. "I am but a toy—it is my rival he loves, who is his desire. Me he has tricked, cozened. O fool that I was to trust a Giorgio lord. But they both shall pay—queen or no queen!"

"Tell me this lover's name, dear friend! I have a sword most men fear——"

Marek pressed his hand closely.

"Yes, I read by my Tzigana skill which has now returned to me, that my eyes are no longer blinded by false love, that I may trust you. My lover was the Count of Savoy! I must kill him! O, undreamed-of liar!"

Louis started violently. Ha, but this was lucky—she might have harmed Jehanne if she was not told the truth.

"He is my husband, by our tribal laws!" raved Marek, biting her nails with strong white teeth.

"Your husband?" Fiercely she told him all her tale.

"I know the Queen well—she does not love him—be satisfied," he said calmly.

Her gaze pierced him sharply, and she laughed.

"So! Who are you that love my rival?" she asked suddenly, and he gasped; for the gipsy's weird Sight had shown her the truth in that one second. He must bind her to silence, and frankness was the one way of doing it.

"Her true and happy lover!" he said straightly. "She only likes the Count of Savoy as a friend—does not even realise he loves her—or, if she does, ignores it, and is only friendly to him. Are you content?"

Marek's wild look and tone calmed.

"Good! That remains for me to prove. Now who are you? for De Chartres is a mere name. I can read you are noble. You may trust me."

"I am Louis, Prince of Taranto." He told her of his disguise, and the rest, and as he ended she nodded very confidently.

"You are a happy lover! All favours you. Take your white queen and leave my traitor to me;—he knows not that I heard him talk in his sleep, so I can deal with him. Ah—he shall suffer, even as I do!"

"How can I take the Queen?" asked Louis scornfully. "Will the Pope dissolve me her vows to Andrea? Folly!"

"Death will free her. I know the stars, and his astre, pale Saturn, suffers eclipse in another week! We must only wait, and then—— But you must now leave Naples, for her sake, lest aught should be known afterwards——"

"Ay, I know. I came even now to bid you farewell. I must also take my sister from Naples, and as we have a villa at Amalfi, and I know its Republic's President very well, we will go and stay there. On a

word from you, I will return here like the wind. But can I aid you in naught now ? ”

“ Not yet, brave friend. Wait, and go now ! ”

He found Marguerite sitting in Capuana's cortile ; and as he appeared she hid something white hastily in her dress.

“ We ride for Amalfi, dearest ;—no questions now, but pack thy gear. I will explain as we ride ! ” he said, and went to warn Pons and Blaudine that they were leaving.

But Marguerite smiled as she ran up to her room, and there danced a few gay steps of a tarantella.

“ Aha ! ” she said to herself. “ The Princess of Taranto may have to dwell awhile at Amalfi, but—she will never leave it ! ”

With which mystic phrase she packed her bale.

A day was gone, but at the siesta-hour Jehanne dared not seek the garden, lest the sentinel should suspect if he saw her there twice ; so she lay day-dreaming on her bed, intending lazily to rise anon, to spin, for she wished to give the banner to the church next Sunday.

The preparations for the Coronation were going on with slow unwillingness on the Neapolitan but with jubilant energy on the Hungarian side. The Castel had hummed all the morning with tailors, jewellers, mantua makers, and furnishers of every kind, and Jehanne's head ached with the effort of speaking politely to the men who fitted her for her splendid new purple surcoat, with its gems and broideries—to her a robe of shame and humiliation. Though she doubted her strength to wear it if the

time ever arrived, she had stood like a doll while they made it.

Now she revelled in the quiet of her room. The door into the anteroom had unnoticed under its heavy fleur-de-lys's portière, slipped its latch, and presently she heard Filippa and Sancia talking in the antechamber. Idly she heard at first, but suddenly she sat up, too interested to check them.

"What if it failed, and he screamed?" asked Sancia.

"Failed—bah! It cannot fail, for Beltramo's hands are like a vice, even if the rope snapped, and Carlo d'Artois there too—be easy! Ahi! If that Red Count were son of mine, how I could love him—never falters, never at a loss!" from Filippa.

Jehanne's hand clasped her other wrist so tight that it loosed a heavy gold bracelet's snap, and it jingled on the marble floor.

"Hush, she wakes!" from Sancia, and they ceased murmuring.

Jehanne sat bolt upright and stared in front of her. They were speaking of Andrea's capture, but there was that in their tones which hinted at more than mere capture. To Jehanne's quick fancy leapt a worse thing. She remembered Filippa's strange speech of Delilah and Samson, and she imagined the rope round Andrea's throat. . . .

Then she was scornful of her own folly, and to check it slipped noiselessly from her bed and went to her wheel. Its purple coil on the winder was satisfactory, but the wheel's ivory hub looked at her like a little twinkling spying eye.

A rope—Samson's throat—had said Filippa. . . .

A rope—the noose of Fate had sung Louis, and the words made mad music in her disordered fancy.

Mechanically she hummed to herself :

“ Spin me a dark grey rope
Like to the bonds which Death—”

She set her stool by the wheel, and her foot found the treader. Whirr—whirr.

“ Link me together three
Hairs of thy living gold—”

That was her hair, of course.

Her thoughts ran on ropes again. How if Delilah had spun her own hair into the rope which held her husband down ? Surely they would have bewitched it to breaking at the treachery.

But Andrea was no Samson. He would screech and writhe like a webbed fly when they bound him with a rope—never strive silently to break it.

Then she laughed. What a fool she was to imagine things ! Why, it was only for his capture that Filippa had said he must be bound. Even then he must not be allowed to scream and alarm his men. Beltramo would gag him quite safely, and even so this silken rope of hers had naught to do with it. They would use some common hemp leashing, not this fine silk. Why did her terrible foolish fancy leap to stranglings and such horrors ? Scarce knowing what she did, she broke off half-a-dozen long gold hairs and spun them into the purple twist, singing lowly :

“ They for my heart shall be,
Rope which for ay shall hold !”

Louis's heart ! How she longed to twine him a little twist of her hair and give it him, with a diamond

heart as pendant, to wear above his own ! Louis's heart ! His last words thrilled suddenly :

“ When I return you will be free ! ”

Free ! Freedom lay in a noose—if it were the Noose of Death in the song. Oh, hideous temptation ! What would happen if she wove the rope, knotted the end, gave it to Amaury, and told him to—— Ah !

In the frenzied second succeeding this dreadful thought she plucked out more hairs, heedless that it hurt, and the wheel hummed like an angry wasp :

“ Stronger than death or hate—
Knot of my High Desire ! ”

There were two Desires, one High, one base as the very floor of the Pit. The last longed for Andrea's death.

A demon seemed to whisper in her ear : “ You might spin that rope ! ”

“ Nay ! He wrought for his ambitions, but not for my life,” said her conscience firmly.

“ He has slain your life's best happiness ! ” said the demon louder. “ Spin ! ”

The purple threads shortened fast, only another yard of loose silk remained, while full six yards lay coiled ready on the floor. She drew out more hairs mechanically and twined on.

“ Then with my sword I reft her from his hand ! ”

Ah, no ! What had Louis said ?—

“ The blood of the churl would stain my Ruby from the Virgin's Crown ! ”

Blood ! Aye, blood would slip from Andrea's throat as the sharp silk cut it if—if—— Could a man strangle and the skin not be cut ?

She had seen a man hanged on the gallows without

Porta Nolana ; the dangling legs, strained neck, rose ghastly before her—

No, no ! A thousand noes ! She would see Amaury, tell him her fear, make him swear that he would only bind Andrea—— !

The last thread left her finger over the wheel's rim, and she whipped it off and knotted the ends so violently that the keen hairs cut the delicate skin of her forefinger, and a tiny crimson drop soaked the purple and gold twist. She could bear no more of her thoughts—she flung the rope from her and clapped her hands with a noise which brought in the startled women in a trice.

“ Get my écharpe, Filippa ! I stifle in here. I am going across to the Empress for a little while ! ”

In the streaming sunlight of early noon, the large audience chamber at Castel Nuovo, with its many long windows giving on to the terrace, was empty save for two persons. Guy de Montleon, very elegant in his grey satin cotte hardie, with its silver belt and neck-chain of frosted silver Genoa filagree, a pink rose over one ear in his dark curls, walked lingeringly, for his arm was round the waist of lovely Cecile des Baux, “ Passe-Rose,” whose beautiful fair head almost rested on his willing shoulder.

But as they walked she started, for a long mirror reflected the whole terrace without. Prince Andrea and Friar Robert were coming in, and they must not find Cecile here duenna-less, for she was not of the Queen's Maids, and Hughes des Baux was a strict father. Guy spied a long sofa, heavily draped with black and white fleur-de-lys'd velvet by the wall, so with a silent little push to Cecile he dropped out of sight behind it, just as the other pair entered the

room. Cecile, quite cool, curtsied and passed out of the nearest window.

But the Prince and his factotum did not go through to the rooms beyond; they remained and talked rapidly, and Guy, behind his dusty sofa, nearly coughed, but by good luck kept mouse-quiet. He was too honourable to willingly eavesdrop, but felt obliged to hear, after the first few words.

"That old sheep-face Clement will never annul it peacefully," said Andrea.

"But we have that which will!" chuckled the monk; and Guy heard his lips smack.

"She likes scented ice-water."

"But if these Neapolitan rats found it out, if——?" asked the Prince viciously, yet his voice shook. "Their action t'other morn showed somewhat—The woman is a witch, I believe!"

"Nay, Andrea mine. That way is unsafe now, too dark. All the world would defend her—inquire into it—but a woman with a tarnished name, as I told thee—what king alive would aid? A Queen who toys shamefully with a vassal—is tried for't in open Court—who shall prevent her lawful husband doing justice on her? Afterwards, if she dies of languor in her penancing-convent, who to blame? No one! First accusation, then sentence. To work carefully."

Andrea's laugh turned Guy cold.

"Pity we dare not accuse the real culprit with her. But Savoy is a rough bear to grip; cousin to too many great houses to be easy pressing. Bah! Jezebel!"

The friar coughed.

"Eh, pity! But our way is best, for the shame is greater. Beltramo d'Artois, her own grandsire's

son's child—much more scandal, and we can have his head risklessly, for he has no County of Savoy to rise defend him! We can laugh at her insolence then—no more proud head-tosses and cursed scorn-smiles then! Oh, Andrea my Prince, you have great helpers and greater future. What will you feel when we set your bride from Buda on your kingly throne by you? You will be great as Ludwig—even greater——”

Andrea struck his hands together childishly delighted.

“Oh, best of helpers, Father! What your aid gives me! A throne, freedom, power! To come, maybe, an heir! A true son of a Hungarian mother, not a brat of this wanton here! Take what thou wilt of mine that day. I am impatient to act now, but we must pass the twentieth of this month safely first——”

“Let us to the garden. Stefan Barazad waits us.”

They went, and Guy, cramped stiff as a lance, lifted a dusty person over his sofa, and gasped in horror.

Queen Jehanne's life and honour were in those two vile men's hands, and they would take both.

He brushed a dusty sleeve. “Ugh! This is no place for a noble Provençal! I stay for her sake only, else I were off to the Alpes Maritimes to-morrow! Bene! I must seek her at once! Eh, my ears seem fated to overhear everything!”

The Palazzo di Taranto's garden on its northern side was only small, but cunningly contrived walks simulated larger space, and its Greek statues from the Morea were even finer than those at Castel Nuovo. From its wide outer wall the Tarentine

guard might look down upon some narrow vici only, but in the wide battlements' embrasures were pleasant seats and tubs of palms and flowers.

Jehanne sat with the Empress in a little marble casino of the garden below, talking feverishly of gowns, jewels, trifles, anything to keep her thoughts from their previous trend; and though her flushed cheek and nervous way made Catherine wonder, she said nothing; and soon, as the sun was setting, Ithamar of Argos came out, announcing that Messer Niccolo Accaijuolo had brought the accounts for her Imperial Highness.

Catherine went in, and Jehanne hoped the great banker's business would not keep her long, as she had a craving for company just then, but after a while, as she did not return, walked down the garden to the steps up the wall.

The sunset's flamy glory was spreading over Naples and the Bay, the reddest ruby crown in all King Phoebus's casket of gems, perhaps the loveliest view of the sky which Naples can show of all its gorgeous days and nights; and in the cooler air of the wall-top Jehanne breathed deeply with pleasure. On the wall's inner side, just there, a huge mass of pink and red geranium climbed right up from ground to coping, even to the battlement summit, where it met a great thick ivy-tree's leaves, growing from without, and Jehanne, idly leaning over, pulled the red petals as she watched the little alley winding twenty feet below.

Suddenly she crouched low behind the fragrant barrier, her hearing painfully alert. Far below walked Andrea and a girl—such a girl! His voice floated up:

“Another kiss, and I must go within, Ninetta mia!”

"Yet come earlier to-night, my lord. I am impatient——"

Jehanne rubbed her eyes. Oh—was it thus the cold, rigid prude played hypocrite? Had it been some splendid lady of pleasure, some dame famous in Naples, it would have seemed less vile. But a poor run-the-street, a wisp of frayed rag that any amateur gallant would shame to chuck under chin in the Mercato!

She flung up her hands to the flaming sky, and her voice was thick like a half-palsied woman's, as she cried:

"Now, Grandsire Robert, look down, and see a toad squat on thy throne! O shame of a king! So much for my too gentle scruples to haul him off thy chair! Ha! ha! ha!" Her laughter was ghastly.

A quick quiet rustle in the ivy made her turn, to find Amaury in a dark blue cloak, slipping off a mask, behind her.

"Now were we right to have him seized and made safe, or no?" he asked her straight, a grim smile on his face.

She nodded, unable to answer.

"I followed them two hours, in my squire's mantle, and found out that she lives in Vico Catania, where he has given her a lodging and many gifts. She sells oranges and lemons in the Mercato, but he had another before her, a similar hussy, a church-candle maker. This girl knifed her, three days ago, lest he should return to her. She was arrested but Wallachia instantly freed her. High time we stopped such games!"

Jehanne was ghost-white, yet her eyes were black

with disgust. Amaury's blunt words fanned her loathing, hardened her resolve.

She saw her fingers red-stained with the petals, and threw them violently away. Amaury read her thoughts, but dared say nothing just then.

Fate, for once timely, stepped in ; for Guy, hearing from Ithamar that Jehanne was on the wall, came up, but, seeing Amaury, stopped short.

"Altesse, can you graciously hear me on a private matter ?" he asked.

With that weird intuition which comes to people in acute crises, she startled both by replying :

"Does it concern the Prince ? If so, speak out. I have no secrets as to him from the Count of Savoy."

The words came very fast, as though she could not steady her voice if she spoke slower. Guy stared, but by this time nothing surprised him very much, so methodically he told her every word of that dreadful dialogue between Prince and friar, except the hint of Amaury's part in matters. That in cold blood under the Red Count's eyes he dared not say.

Jehanne neither hid her face nor fainted, but stood staring at the glowing fire in the western sky, her lips moving, but no sound coming thence.

She swayed a little on her feet ; Amaury put out a ready arm, but she fenced him off, and made a few short high steps forward, as if the very ground held snare for her feet—for her soul she felt the powers of evil did. Oh, by the Gates of Gehenna ! She had invoked King Robert's spirit in sooth ! Her wildest nightmare had held no such horror as Guy's tale. Andrea sought first her crown, then her honour, and lastly her life ! Oh, the enormous shame he dug for

her! Beltramo d'Artois. Horror! And she had scrupled virtuously to even order the arrest of the author of all these infamies! O foolish scruples, more foolish hesitation!

Guy's voice roused her now, entreating, boldened by need.

"Altesse, we pray you to act speedily. For my part, I hold prison too good for such a wretch! Forgive me—we are your devoted servants——"

The lad's plain words conjured up her temptation again most horribly. The mad desire rose in her to cry to Amaury: "Do what you will with him! He is my foe!" and how strong that desire was, no pen can tell. Yet suddenly rose Louis's face, stern and set: and the sword of honour even to such a beast defended her from herself.

Yet for her kingdom she must act. She felt as one on a shifting quicksand, who sees the sea rise about him—and her only refuge was the leaky ship of the conspiracy. Guy said the only thing which could have weighed with her just then.

"Altesse, there was one other thing they said I—dare not tell," he faltered, looking at Amaury.

But Amaury laughed the sharp laugh of a man who sees his enemy coming towards him at last.

"Out with it, Guy! They said that I, and not Beltramo, was the Man?"

Guy's face was whiter than Jehanne's. He fell on his knees.

"Altesse, they did!" and bowed his face in her dress folds.

For one moment she stared at Amaury as if she did not understand; then, as the fierce fire leapt into his eyes, and his lips blanched and parted, she knew

that if Guy had not been there he would have taken her in his arms! She knew now that the Red Count's devotion was red love—and the shock thrilled her too deeply, to show him then the glaring truth, that she was another's. Amaury watched her closely, but he deemed her impassiveness self-control, and ventured a great thing.

"Would you not also think prison too mild?" he asked slowly.

The world rocked about her. These words seemed to confirm her dread suspicion—nay, to show her that her fancy was tangible, real horror! She put her two hands upon his shoulders so that he must face her eyes.

"Amaury, answer me! What mean you?" she asked like a judge.

He saw the black horror in her eyes, read his course clear, and with a face as calmly impassive as a brazen idol, replied:

"More humiliation than mere capture—some punishment!"

But Jehanne was alert enough—the murder-phantom haunted her, would not down.

"No, no! You mean you would all fain slay him—and though the cause is great, I know, I will not lend my word to murder. Hear you that, Amaury? Ah—I have been so terrified. I heard Filippa talk of a rope. It fills me with dread. Oh, Amaury—I will not rest till you swear to me now that you will not do more than bind him! Swear it!"

Amaury saw now that Jehanne needed wary leading—and he never halted.

"My word is my bond!" he said solemnly as before an altar.

Yet her abandonment of his formal name had set him in the seventh heaven, and he could scarce keep back the joy from his look as he clasped both her hands and said earnestly :

“ Yet we have your consent to take him captive when and as we think best ? ”

And she, knowing that the sea of danger rose to her knees, answered firmly :

“ Yes, my full consent to that—that only ! ” but her own voice was dim to her ears, for the consciousness of his hot love was dawning gradually upon her, and scorched her with yet another terror.

But to her infinite relief he bowed with elaborate courtesy :

“ A thousand thanks, Majesty ! ”

For the Empress Catherine and Princess Marie with her were coming towards them, Marie humming a verse of Boccaccio's as she came.

Two things had escaped Jehanne, however : the first was the look Guy gave skywards when Amaury pledged his word ; the second was Marek, sitting at the bottom of the wall in the Vico, clad in the robe of a begging nun. She had followed Amaury while he dogged Andrea !

* * * * *

Once again a nobly manned felucca rode lightly in the moonlight on the Bay of Naples. It was the night after the scene upon Palazzo di Taranto's garden wall, and the conspirators knew that they had no time to lose ; so as many as could slip away unseen were now assembled in the boat.

“ Now, lords, you all see that I was right,” said Bertrand des Baux bluntly. “ The Queen will not consent to er—more than imprisonment. She will

fall upon us, shrieking we have bloodied her name before all Europe! What is to be done?"

For two tense moments there was silence, and then Filippa, her woman's hate hottest and sharpest of all, put the torch to their laid pile.

"Princes under stress of their state-burdens have been known to commit suicide," she spat, rearing her fierce white face on her strong neck like some woodland cobra. "But how? For his Magyar nurse told me that he is charmed against steel and poison: twice in his youth have these failed, though once he actually drank wine which killed a taster afterwards."

"He might fall from a tower-top—sail in a leaky boat," said the Empress slowly.

Then struck in Charles of Durazzo:

"The Sultan of Tunis's ambassador told me a fair tale of bow-strings——"

"If he hung himself, we could tell the Queen he went mad when we made him prisoner!" said Bertrand des Baux deliberately.

"I always said Bertrand was a worthy Grand Justicer," thought Amaury gleefully.

"Well thought, Bertrand," he added aloud. "But he is strictly guarded now, and it must be done before the 20th. Aha! I have it. His camerlengo, Messer Tomaso di Pace, is the greatest lick-shoon alive. With a countship, easily given, we make him ours. He, too, is hand in glove with Niccolo di Milazzo, the rascally notary who makes out all Andrea's documents. These twain would work together, if we bait them well! And, after all, if our plan is not all that could be desired, remember that it is for the saving of our beloved Queen and country. No private

scruples may stand before such noble end ! Naples, the Queen, gentlemen ! ”

He smiled serenely, in the dark, to himself, as the approving murmur ran. Then he continued :

“ So I take it that we may now unfalteringly agree to save our Queen from the consequences of her too-noble hesitation to free her people, and save her own dear life. Afterwards, as Bertrand says, we can persuade her that we did rightly. Dead rats cannot bite. Are you all with me ? ”

The chorus of yeas was unanimous, and in the dark the Red Count rubbed his hands, well pleased.

Before the felucca put to land they had planned all the details.

CHAPTER XV

By the eighteenth of September, Castel Nuovo hummed like a hive with the preparations for the coronation on the twentieth, so that when Messer Tomaso di Pace, his Chamberlain, proposed that the Prince should escape the bustle awhile by a hawking party in the direction of Aversa, to wind up with a night at its ancient Convento, and return to Naples on the morrow just in time to welcome the Papal Legate, Andrea readily accepted, and with his wife and a small train rode out in the fair sunny morning.

Jehanne, too, welcomed any diversion in the anxious strain she bore, and as he rode beside her, Andrea noted nothing unusual in her manner, but she held her bird, talked and rode as one in a passive dream. She had not seen Amaury alone since the time on the Tarentine wall, nor had she dared question Filippa as to when Andrea was to be seized, fearing her own breakdown if she knew in advance, and even this morning she scarce dared look Amaury in the face, and avoided him instinctively in the chase.

Besides him, with her rode now only Bertrand des Baux, Pierre de Lascaris, Guy de Montleon, and her unofficial uncle, King Robert's son Charles, Comte d'Artois, Filippa, Sancia, and Mabrice di Pace.

With Duke Charles came Duchess Marie, attended by Margarita di Ceccano, her maid ; Andrea, the Ban of Wallachia (who had sued Jehanne's pardon) and Nicholas Ungaro, Niccolo di Milazzo, and di Pace, and the needful archers, grooms and falconers completed the party. The Empress, Marzano and every one else were busy as bees in Naples.

Niccolo di Milazzo, the herald-notary, a little ferrety-faced man, rode by di Pace on a flea-bitten grey, and their whispers were quick as they passed Porta Capuana. Tomaso jerked his thumb backwards.

"A safe return to some one!—but feet foremost!"

"Surely—unless the sky falls," replied Niccolo quaintly. Vesuvius grimly puffing black smoke in the distance seemed to hint Something Else was much more likely to open, but neither heeded. Tomaso patted his pouch.

"Oh, all is too safe! I have the powders for the monks here. We shall get there an hour after Ave Maria. Ha, the Queen unhoods!—forward!"

They had fair sport in the plain of Aversa, and in the noon heat picnicked gaily under an olive grove by a little stream, and after the luncheon, while Pierre de Lascaris told a story, which amused even Andrea, no one noted that Amaury and Bertrand had wandered off together among some vines.

"Let us pray the Hungarian troops arrive not!" said Bertrand.

"Pooh!" said Amaury, "most unlikely. I left all in order even so—at the first alarm, Raimond, Hugues and the Empress hold the Castel—be easy! Yet mark—though 'tis most impossible—if to-night here there *should* be a failure—I sent my own galley

to Baia, and you have got the Seal of Provence from Hugues——”

The Chief Justicer smiled oddly. “Ere I go any further, Amaury, my King, I have a favour to sue. The County of Provence needs a Count !”

Amaury gasped. Lordship of a full quarter of his kingdom was a staggering price, but one which at this crisis he could not refuse. Ah well—promise was one thing—performance another.

“Thou art Count, and we will reign together, old friend,” he said genially, as they turned to join the rest.

“I should have felt much safer had we been going to Raimond’s place, Castello de Casaluce d’Aversa to-night,” said Bertrand.

“Fool !” said Amaury, but without offence. “Why, that was just why we chose the innocent Convento ! Sh—sh !”

And during the pleasant idling of the afternoon, Amaury’s careless frivolity, and inconsequential chatter excited Guy de Montleon’s deepest admiration. “With all that on his mind, he can joke Mabrice about her new necklet ! Truly he is a ruler born !” murmured the lad as he watched the Red Count open his mouth and wager Duchess Marie that she could not throw ten olives into it, from ten paces distance.

The sport was less good in the later afternoon, and before dusk fell they hooded hawks, and rode for the Convento or monastery of San Pietro di Majella, just outside the little town of Aversa. Some distance from it rose the towers of Casaluce, a fief granted to the Des Baux by King Charles I.

The Convento was famous for its cloisters’ beautiful

marble colonnade and fountain, and for its lovely garden, overlooked by the Abbot's rooms, now assigned to the royal visitors, who might thence admire its fine orange, myrtle, and lemon trees, and its glow of passion flowers and heliotrope.

Its amiable easy-going Abbot Carlo di Capece (once Count di Capece) noted that the monks, pleased as children, were peeping about slyly in hopes of a lucky glance of their Queen, laughed to her, whereat she asked and obtained that the whole Convento might waive its rule, and sup with the party in the Refectory, where Berto di Cabano had had laid a repast which did him credit as a majordomo.

An hour before midnight the royal party quitted the genial Abbot, and went to their rooms, where sleep soon reigned, also in that shared by the two Hungarian boiars.

But an hour after midnight, in that chamber allotted to Amaury, in the outer wall of the adjoining Guest House, there was wakefulness indeed. Its lamp showed Bertrand des Baux, with steel shirt under cotte hardie, and riding-boots ready to don, straining anxious eyes from the window which overlooked the road into Aversa and Naples, and kneeling beside him his friend.

Filippa whispered with Charles d'Artois, and deepest anxiety felt all.

"They are horribly late—what can have happened?" said Amaury irritably.

"Guy is turning the keys on the Ban and Nicholas, Duke Charles is minding Marie, and Sancia will quiet Jehanne, if need be," said Filippa.

"She knows not, then, that 'tis to be to-night?" asked Bertrand.

"No; we thought she might have grown fearful at the last. Hark! Hooves!" replied Filippa, as the door opened softly and Niccolo di Milazzo's ferret face poked in.

"Berto and I have been dosing cups all round," he said. "The Abbot took his bedside-cup with him, let us trust he drinks it. But we could not manage the Ban's nor more than half the varlets. I think that is Beltramo at last. I will let him in—the reverend porter sleeps." He went as Guy, with a key, and Mabrice di Pace came in.

Presently entered Beltramo d'Artois, a square-built young giant, with close-cropped dark hair and thick dark brows which met across his high nose—a trait of the house of Anjou, which Boccaccio called "*Il maschio naso*" in Charles I. The Count of Terlizzi, an elderly man with a grey upstanding badger's brush of hair, came with him, and slipped off his cloak.

"A rumour was running the city that some troops have reached Capua, but though we waited, we left without its confirmation," he said to the company. "Is all well here? Ai—ai! How?"

A tall monk entered with uplifted hand, saying hollowly:

"Bless ye, my children!"

Consternation reigned one wild second ere Amaury rent off the screening cowl, whereat was a relieved giggle.

Pierre de Lascaris, jestful, even then had stolen a frock and grinned at them.

"Have done, young fool!" growled Amaury, shaking him slightly. "What now?"

"O reason! I thought I had best take the porter's

place while you are above, for one never knows who might come," replied Pierre, and Amaury embraced him almost gaily.

"Well thought of, mon brave—go!"

With his going grim tragedy put on her mask again. Guy noted with that odd interest which comes to men in great moments, that Filippa was the only unmoved one of all; her fierce eyes never wavered, while Bertrand played with his hilt, and Amaury kept stroking his moustache.

Terlizzi nervously tightened his shoe-ties, Niccolo tiptoed to the door, while Mabrice's breath came and went in catches, but else she was steady. The tower-bell sounding the half-hour, and the few moments after till its monkish ringer should have retired cellwards again, ended their waiting. Amaury straightened his shoulders and loosened his dagger.

"Time!" he said briefly; and as Beltramo rolled back his green cuffs above his brawny elbows, Filippa turned up her skirt-hem, and untied some tapes. Like a snake on the floor fell the hidden purple silk rope.

She laughed low and terribly as Beltramo took, tested, and made a running noose in its end.

"I got it secretly from the Queen's armoire," she explained.

Guy suddenly turned sick. Fluttering court-gallant though he was, his old race's Provençal honour stuck at sight of the rope, and he resolved he would only be shield, not blade, in the coming villainy, though he might not betray his fellows in it, since they trusted him.

Jehanne's room overlooked a cortile, and had no anteroom, but opened directly into the passage,

across which lay Andrea's chamber. This looked into the Abbot's garden, and on one side of it lay Tomaso di Pace's bedroom, on the other side an ante-room, both with doors into the Prince's bedroom. The Duke and Duchess of Durazzo had rooms on the same side as Jehanne, but farther along the corridor.

Amaury, heading the creeping procession in its single file, was met by the Duke at the passage's last turn, sheet-white, and barefooted. He set the one dim corridor-lamp in a deeper niche, though one felt in that gloom, one did not see.

"All is lost!" he whispered. "That nurse-woman of his, Isolda, has somehow suspected a move, and followed her nurseling from Naples. Now she sleeps across his bed-foot. Tomaso opened his door a crack and saw her—but both sleep sound."

Amaury replied: "Then we must entice him into the anteroom, and silence her somehow."

"I know!" said Mabrice's low voice. "I will enter from father's room, Andrea will wake, see me only, and not cry out."

Niccolo glided up. "Isolda may not wake, for I saw her drink from one of my jugs at supper."

"I will tell the Prince the Queen waits in the ante-room; he will go out, and father will bolt the bedroom door behind him. Isolda will think he has hung himself while she slept, but if she wakes——" Mabrice drew a long sharp stiletto from her hair. "We can bury her in the garden thicket."

"You shall be a Duchess for this!" whispered Amaury to her. "Aye! Tell him a messenger from Naples waits—now!"

Mabrice flitted into her father's room from the passage, like some soft dark bat, and the others, headed by Beltramo, pushed softly like foxes into a covert into the anteroom, and hid behind various curtains; but Amaury and Bertrand, with drawn daggers, kept the passage door, like the hunt's prickers. Duke Charles stood before his wife's door, feeling sure his heart-beats were loud enough to waken her, while Guy did sentry to the Queen.

Mabrice opened the door between her father's room and Andrea's, and by the pale golden flame of the night-lamp saw that across the wide bed-foot, a woman slept, her head wrapped in a Hungarian caftan, and shoeless, but otherwise fully dressed. The Prince lay on his back, his mouth half open, his breathing deep, his face white in the shadow of his hair. Mabrice shut the door, then slid across to the anteroom door and opened it soundlessly, to seem as if she had entered by it.

Then she crept back, and with her cool hand touched Andrea's cheek, so as to wake him gradually.

Jehanne slept uneasily upon the Abbot's soft bed. She tossed, turned, and finally dreamed fitfully that she walked in her garden again with Louis, but that Andrea appeared threatening him with drawn poignard. She flung herself between them, felt the steel's hot agony in her breast, and a warm flood over her hand. The fantastic terror woke her, to find that her hand did dangle wetly down the bedside, for she had overturned a cup of wine in her struggles—a cup which she had not drunk, to Filippa's secret dismay.

The streaming moonlight showed her red patches of it on her nightrobe, so she noiselessly rose and changed it for a long crimson dressing-gown. She lay down again, but not to sleep.

She drew Louis's ring from its chain in her laces, and putting it on her finger nursed her hand lovingly and mused long. But the nightmare lingered, and filled her with evil presentiments, and her black wonders of the past rose sharply. What would happen—how, when? Foolishness! Had not Amaury sworn no harm should be done? Yet unbelief in him cried out loudly to her reason; instinct's voice said, "There is more!" She blunted this sharp spur with the saddle-padding of timid procrastination, and dreamed on.

But suddenly, with a faint rustle, Sancia slipped from her little bed, and crawled rather than moved to the door opposite Jehanne's couch, knelt by the key-hole and listened intently. With a lazy fascination Jehanne watched through her lashes, when suddenly an iron fear gripped her mind, for a faintest foot-padding, felt rather than heard, struck her dread-sharpened senses. As Sancia knelt, her two long thin plaits of black hair over her white night rail, brought the Rope and Wheel to Jehanne's quick thought. Black ropes! Ugh! They would bind Andrea with ropes—what? Were they doing it now? Samson—Delilah—ah! what if Amaury lied, and they were hanging, strangling Andrea now? The fear was hideous, and yet she could not move, but gripped her hand, over its fellow, with the ring.

It must be a dream—it could not be real, that she should lie there quiet, voiceless, holding Louis's ring,

while they slew Andrea without ! A dream—yet what did Sancia kneel there for in the night ?

A little choking cough rose in her mouth, and instantly Sancia was at the bedside strangely alert, and asking with slightly unsteady tone : “ What ails my Queen ? ”

“ An evil dream. Sancia, what is a-foot to-night ? Why were you up ? ” She seized the Sicilian’s hands, and they shook more than her own.

“ Naught ! I thought I heard Duke Charles walk by—perchance he is sick,” stammered Sancia, but Jehanne was not blinded.

“ I heard more feet. Sancia, you are keeping it from me : ’tis to-night the Prince has to be carried off.”

“ Well, you knew—It had to be. It is all being done very well. Ah, forgive me—lie down ! ” With desperation’s strength she pushed Jehanne on her back again, and held her by the shoulders, helpless.

“ Let me up ! I must see, know—Madonna ! It is worse than that—Sancia ! Loose me lest I hurt you—ah !——”

For a moment they wrestled, and then with a twist Jehanne slipped from bed, gained her feet, and made for the door ; but Sancia, tripping her heel, they clutched one another on the floor.

“ Santa Lucia ! For heaven’s sake be still, beloved ! You ruin all ! ” gasped Sancia. “ You must not go—sight of you would madden the Prince ! Wait five minutes, and then you shall ask the Sieur des Baux—he will tell you they do but bind him. Forgive me, my dear ! ”

Jehanne stood up, quite quiet, though her breath

laboured, her gaze fixed fiercely intent upon the door, as she silently listened with all her might. A terrible war was waged in her soul again as her fears blazed up. If—if—they were doing murder despite all—it was her deliverance sure and certain—her freedom, her open gate to Louis! Should she rush and prevent it? It was like a dreadful fresco she had seen of the Weighing of Souls in the Judgment. In one scale lay love, in the other honour. Louis, Andrea—Andrea, Louis! The balancing drove her mad, but suddenly the ghastly riddle solved itself.

Three or four quick thuds on the floor without were felt, soft feet padded away—then silence. Next loud in the quiet rose a long wild wail of a woman—unmistakable for aught but utter despair.

With a leap Jehanne escaped Sancia and got at the door, the passage—dark as any mine. She reached the anteroom of Andrea, and stayed there one fearful instant, as if stricken into stone.

Meanwhile Andrea, at Mabrice's touch, opened his eyes.

"What is it?" he murmured sleepily.

"The Queen sent me to ask your Majesty to come to her in the anteroom. She has had important news," said Mabrice in her velvet whisper, praying inwardly that Isolda would sleep on.

He slipped from the clothes, and she saw with surprise that he, too, wore his long day-hose and white shirt, as if he had expected a hasty rousing, but while she wondered, he snatched up a loose robe, and went from the fatal door. Noiselessly she shut it behind him, and then the one from her father's room

opened, and he with a gleam of steel in hand, stood over the sleeping woman. Niccolo di Milazzo came in, too, and noting the bolt was missing from the ante-room door, thrust his sheathed stiletto into the staples. Andrea amazedly found the anteroom perfectly dark, but as the girl shut the door at his back, the lamplight from behind just showed him a dark figure, which sprang—and Beltramo's wrestler-grip choked the voice from his throat. Yet he wriggled furiously, and as Beltramo's foot caught in a rug, he got free, but gasped too much to call. His sword lay on his bed—oh, unutterable folly to have left it! The door was fast as he fell against it, then madly plunged forward for the other door in the murky gloom. But even as he leapt, a jerk came at his throat. The silken rope was about it, and ran taut!

A gurgling half-scream came from him: "Tomaso—Stefan! Ahi—aid!" He fell to the floor, writhing, tearing, beating at the air, as other hands seized his legs and wrists.

His limbs stiffened in a frightful convulsion, his eyes rolled up, his tongue turned in his mouth; but the last thing he saw was that the room was light again and full of men. Then Prince Andrea gasped and died. But even as the conspirators watched the end by the lamp's light (brought in by Bertrand) a shriek came through the bedroom door.

Isolda was awake. "Andrea!—oh, my Andrea! Help!" she screamed at top pitch. Taking Mabrice by the neck she flung her backwards like a pillow, and gained the passage by the outer door, ere Niccolo could grasp her, and though he knocked her head

against the wall, that shriek was the end of all secrecy. Jehanne's door opened—and Marie's!

Into the room of death rushed Pierre de Lascaris, wild-eyed, with: "All's up, Amaury! Friar Robert and an escort are come from Naples. I let him in and slammed the gate into the others' faces. He told me that a Hungarian army has entered Naples, but the Empress holds the Castel——"

"Where is the friar? St. Honorat! Where?" cried Bertrand.

Pierre held up his wet red dagger.

"I rolled him into an open grave in the cloisters, and shoved in the earth," he said briefly.

It was the most terrible moment in an appalling whole, but Amaury recovered first, and pointed a steady finger at the gruesome Thing on the floor. The mouth was set stiff already, in that ghastly O peculiar to the strangled, and the lips were frothed.

"Are we going to be caught standing here? What's to fear in him? Set that stool overturned just below that hook—so!"

The limp Thing's head rolled on the neck absurdly horrible as the two Artois lifted it mechanically, while Bertrand cast the loose rope-end over an iron lamp-hook in the wall, which seemed strong but which tore from the plaster as if refusing the horrid weight.

The Thing slipped from their half-relaxed grips to the floor.

"Curse the fool!" growled Amaury, with a sweeping survey of the walls. "No other possible hook! Hell! Yet—a thought——" He swiftly undid the long window, whose marble balcony-rail gleamed

white. "He might have done it over here. Bad place, but possible. Quick ! for our lives, bring him hither !"

But just as they bore It across the room, with its dangling head and feet, Jehanne slipped under Guy's impeding arm, and stood clutching at the wall for balance.

They all halted, and stared at her.

Then she sprang from the wall, and was close to them.

"Assassins ! Oh, assassins !" she said very low.

Breathing sharply, Amaury stepped between her and—It.

"You must get hence, adorée," he said quietly.

"No ! no ! Murderer ! O horrible deed !" Her lips parted, her eyes glared ; she would shriek next instant. That must be prevented at all cost, and Amaury calmly lifted her, tall woman though she was, like a child, and only released that clasp of steel when he set her down in Andrea's room. Then as her lips opened he covered them with gentle but firm hand.

"If you scream we are dead men all, and you dishonoured !" he said.

"Murderer !" she threw at him ; but he heeded it not, and went on :

"Calm thee, my Jehanne ! 'Twas for thee, thou knowest—I have sold my soul to free thee, to claim this dear price. Nay, this is but frenzy—beloved !"

In dimness as in some red delirium's whirl, she felt him kiss her lips with a touch that fairly scorched with passion, and though she was too stunned to do anything but lie passive in his arms just then, she

was denied the mercy of unconsciousness. She rallied and looked into his eyes with their wild wolfish desires.

“Amaury—traitor, I hate you!” she said, each deliberate word cold as a drop of ice. He searched her face one baffled glimpse of time, and found the amazing truth; but he was not the man to admit or accept defeat, and rose to the occasion now as valiantly as ever he did to a fight.

He laughed shortly. “Well played, most seemly, chérie! Love! love! As if I could not wait! My Jehanne—my——Ha, Holy Shroud! What is it?” for Mabrice flew in, her hand bleeding, her hair unbound.

“That damned Isolda gained her senses, and is hammering at the Abbot’s door. The fool Niccolo let her slip instead of stabbing her! I tried!”

Guy de Montleon was in by the other door.

“The men outside suspect—as the friar comes not out—and are breaking open the gate. What can we do, Amaury?”

Amaury turned to Jehanne. “We must hence now! Get her gear in a sack, Filippa, and in half-an-hour we will be far. Are they many, Guy?”

“I will not go—I will denounce it all! I am a murderess too!” raved Jehanne wildly. “I consented—ah!”

Noise rose from without, poundings on the gate, monks stirring within. Amaury glanced desperately round as Bertrand des Baux came in, his mantle wrapped round his left arm, his great sword drawn.

“If the monks and Ban learn the truth from that

Isolda, we had best fight our way to Casaluce," he said.

"Aye, but give me that cloak, Bertrand," said Amaury, glancing at Jehanne; and ere she could struggle or scream, he had whipped its thick folds over her head, and lifting her like a doll, strode out of the room and along to the outer staircase leading to the garden.

Rough grip and smothering cloth finished her endurance, and she fainted dead away.

"Fate favours us! She swoons," said Amaury, feeling her grow limp, to Bertrand, who followed closely. "Get thy destrier quickly, and out by the back gate. Then for Baia as the devil were behind, and sail for Garde Joyeuse. She will protest at first—heed not but hold her safe. I will come in a few days. Thou hast the Seal—hence!"

They crossed the garden to the postern leading to the Guest House stables, and Bertrand took Jehanne from his accomplice, who hastily turned to remount the stairs. Suddenly he saw the dread Thing which swung from the balcony, and involuntarily shuddered for the first time that night. Then he started, for from the dark oleander bushes of the garden, crooned a weird haunting voice, like some echo of the riot in his brain.

"Sieur Amaury de la Garde Joyeuse,
Prends garde à toi—ton honneur baisse son voile!
Sieur Amaury de la Garde Joyeuse,
La Reine n'est pas, ni ne sera ton étoile!"

All the superstitions he had crowded upon him, and his very hair bristled. The night grew alive with evil things, for who but a fiend could know here of

Garde Joyeuse ? Yet he drew, and dashed straight for the bushes, but—there was nothing there ! Only a faint little laugh chuckled derisively from a far corner. Ugh ! this was too much. He rushed up the stairs as if pursued by demons.

Marek, disguised as a beggar, rose quietly and crept below the balcony to hear yet more.

The other conspirators stood blankly in the fatal room, when Amaury entered again, but before he could address them, a figure with scared white face and streaming golden-bronze hair, drifted in—Jehanne, or her wraith ?

“Duchess Marie !” from several mouths. “Maria mia ! Go away !” from Sancia (Filippa had vanished to get Jehanne’s necessities, and had not returned).

“Gentlemen, behold Queen Jehanne comes ! Majesty, we pray you retire !” said Amaury superbly.

“What madness now ?” asked Duke Charles, not understanding.

“Sanity, Duke. Your Duchess must don her sister’s veil. I have put the Queen in safety for a while : it is needful, for even if the Hungarians capture your wife they cannot harm her—she is not Queen Jehanne ! She will pass, for weeping queens are not close-eyed by the mob. You must go at once to Casaluce and take Mabrice di Pace in your wife’s mantle. I have prepared all !”

“Where is Jehanne ? Where is the Prince ?” faltered Marie with a wild look round ; and then, seeing Terlizzi and Niccolo look at the open window, she guessed, and ere they could stop her, had reached it—seen What hung—and fainted on the balcony,

between whose pillars fell her loose hair, mingling with the very rope.

“Ah!” quoth Terlizzi with a terrible smile. “Excellent! Queen Jehanne faints upon discovering her husband’s suicide!”

Sancia came in, and hurriedly threw over the Duchess Jehanne’s discarded night rail.

Confusion was buzzing in the Convento, and the whole of the conspirators, with the promptness of a well-drilled army, obeyed unquestioningly Amaury’s orders. The Duke and Mabrice vanished together, while Guy, only pausing to unlock the door of the Ban’s room as he passed, dropped with infinite relief on to the highroad through an open window. Then he made for Casaluce, en route for Naples, to bring the reinforcements to escort the false Queen to her capital.

Save for those who had drunk Niccolo’s powdered wines, the whole Convento rose, the front gate was undone, and Friar Robert’s little escort swarmed in, asking questions, just as Bertrand des Baux, on his great grey destrier, his precious burden in his arm, swept out by the back.

The Abbot, though somewhat dazed with sleep, rose and went up to the room, and stopped petrified when he saw the group there.

But Amaury stepped forward instantly.

“Father, terrible doings here! Prince Andrea has gone mad and hung himself, and the Queen is distraught over it. See!”

But even as he spoke, Isolda like an avenging fury stood there.

“Liar! Andrea was murdered! I was there!”

Why wear you all day-gear in the dead of night ? I am the axe of justice——” speech failed her.

“Nay, Father, this woman is mad ! The Prince and Queen were together, as he felt ailing he said, and then he requested her to fetch him a draught of wine from her chamber. When she returned he hung there—see, the wine hath stained her robe ! She shrieked, and we came, for we had robed on hearing the clamour at the gate below— She told us this ere she swooned.” But before the peaceable, dazed Abbot could reply, the Ban of Wallachia rushed in, his sword drawn.

One glance from the window told him all, and he turned as a boar does ere it charges. He rushed for Amaury, but the Abbot threw himself between.

“Accursed Savoy, this is your work !” howled the Ban.

“This is no time to war, boiar—have you no decency ?” asked the Abbot. He indicated the heap of white robe and gold hair by the window.

“No ! None !” roared the Ban, and made for Savoy again, but the Abbot hung on to his shoulders, and Amaury with sheathed blade stepped back.

Then the storm broke. Isolda’s shouted accusations to the friar’s men and the Hungarians of the Prince’s train, had their effect, and unawed by either Queen or Abbot’s presence, they stormed the room, yelling, demanding, threatening, brandishing weapons.

“Fall to, lads !” said Amaury grimly. “We must hew our way to Naples I see.” Beltramo, pick up her Majesty and follow me !” And as the swords darted and flashed in the torch-flare, and the moans began to

mix with the yells, the trumpets of the men from Casaluce blared out at the Convento gate.

The Red Count's way was cleared to Naples, and meanwhile the Grand Justicer was bearing Queen Jehanne far from her kingdom.

CHAPTER XVI

ALONG the quiet Roman roads to Baiæ, running between sleeping farms and villas, there was a steady beat of hooves. Aversa and its terrors sank behind, the night was less dark, and as his big destrier plunged its heavy gallop through the dust, Bertrand des Baux drew freer breath than for long. His men rode behind silent as ghosts, the close wrapped burden of his shield-arm never stirred. He shifted his rein to his teeth, and undid the cloak over her head. It lay against his shoulder, a white oval of face in a sinister setting of crimson cloth ; Bertrand, spite of himself crept, and pulled it away till her hair lay next his green cotte hardie.

“ St. Gilles ! This is a long faint ! ” he thought. “ But better than another outcry. Her breathing is even enough. Hold up, horse ! You bear a kingdom on your grey back ! ”

Thud, thud, the pounding hooves sped, but Jehanne lay silent, and the coast-breeze smelt salt before she even sighed. Then as they heard the wave-splash, and the white dust turned to yellow sand, under the hooves, her senses knew the jolt of the mortal world again as incarnate in the grey destrier's stride.

“ Where am I ? ” her faint lips asked.

“ In safety, my Queen. It is only Des Baux who

holds you. All is well, we are nearly at Baiæ. See, there lies our galley——”

He pointed it to her as if she were a child, feeling oddly helpless with her.

“Ah!” she sighed and droused off again, rather to his relief.

The open strand of old world, Roman memoried, luxurious Baiæ fronted them, and welcome sight, just off the Molo, Amaury’s own swift galley *La Savoyarde*, swung at anchor, her lanterns burning cheerfully, her deck-watch moving alertly about.

Then only Bertrand drew rein, and raised his hawking whistle with keen delight. Instantly a boat was lowered, and shot towards the Molo through the slight tumble of inky water, and in ten minutes Bertrand laid his burden on a silken couch in a brilliantly lighted cabin, while without the sailors were setting sail with all speed.

Amaury’s crew was a picked one, as usual, and presently the ship plunged seawards, even while Bertrand was bending over Jehanne in the cabin, which was sweet with the scent of roses, and ready with all comforts for the voyage.

She sighed and opened her eyes as the new motion of the ship roused her, and then sharply sat up, with the swift question:

“What means this—? Where am I? Bertrand des Baux, what do you here?”

Then suddenly the full recollection of the night’s dreadful deeds rushed upon her.

“Ah—my God! Andrea is dead! I slew him—at least——”

She hid her face on the pillow again, and Bertrand stooped over her and touched her shoulder

gently with the awkwardness of a man soothing a child.

“Not you, my Queen—Eh, Madonna! Know you not there were a dozen others to the deed? It was to save both you and Naples!”

“Naples? Then why am I here—away? Where is Amaury?”

“Wait, wait, Altesse! Amaury had to stay behind, and fight his way out. True! I forgot—You had swooned, look you, and word came that Hungary hath kept his threats, and that an army was in Naples, and so Amaury deemed you safest till he had driven it thence again. Thus I brought you away, and now we sail for Provence, where Amaury will join us anon—Then you will be safe and happy again——”

She had listened to his smooth words like one in some dreadful dream, but the last phrase struck through its dimness.

“Happy! Amaury shall die! He is an assassin! He has shamed me before the whole world! He usurps my power! I saw him unmasked this night—Hungarian army in my Naples? O saints! I am like to run mad! Ruined! Mad! Ah—ah—ah—!”

She sprang up and paced the cabin in a perfect frenzy, staggering as the floor swayed with the sea. Bertrand eyed her in utter embarrassment. He expected an outburst of sorts, but not this. There was no love for Amaury in Queen Jehanne’s revelations—Suppose——?

He tried another soothing salve.

“Calm you, I implore you, my dearest liege! This is a passing horror of your noble spirit’s disgust at—the Prince’s death—But it had to be! He plotted

your death, he would have reft your very honour from you ! Heavens, Majesty ! We *had* to do it—Why, to save you, every man of us would have gone hot-foot to hell!—and some of us are like to do so, seeing how things turned out when—it failed—Reflect— You must see there was no other way.”

“ By San Gennaro I will have the assassin’s head ! ” she raved, staring wildly about her. A very faint smile lit the Grand Justicer’s lips.

“ Eh, then, you will have a busy time, Altesse—for there are a good twenty and more of us—beginning with the Empress, and Duke Charles, and Marzano—”

Jehanne sobered slightly, and sank upon the couch again.

“ Madonna ! I was forgetting ! ” she murmured. “ But I never realised it was death thus ! Oh——” She hid her face again in despair, and Bertrand be-thought him it was time to quieten her by other means.

On the table stood a tall gold aiguière of wine, and a cup set with amethysts, and he filled the cup, standing with his back to her, and dropping into it a little something from a ring he slipped from his girdle-pouch.

“ But we must return to Naples—Go, order the captain to turn sail—It is utter madness to say we go to Provence ! I will not ! Amaury is crazed ! ”

“ We must go ! You cannot re-enter Naples, while it swarms with the foe ! How could you ? Be wise, Altesse ! Amaury will clear your way first——”

“ I will behead him ! He is an assassin ! He is

Judas ! I loathe him ! I command you to obey me ! Give orders at once—or I will—— ! ”

Unhappy Des Baux was beaten at last. He could find no further padding to keep her from the hard truth—that she was his prisoner. He set his broad back against the door just as she dashed for it, and faced her sternly, his fingers deftly turning the key as he stood thus.

“ Nay—O Majesty, make it no harder for me—I have sworn to Amaury to take you safely ! I cannot help it—Pray, pray calm you—You must not go up on deck thus— It is not known you are the Queen—It is thought you are a prisoner to Savoy, and the men are all Savoyards—They would not heed any orders but mine—Your dignity—eh, I appeal to you ! Sit you I pray, and hear my explanation of matters—Duchess Marie donned your veil and robe, and will ride into Naples as Queen. You will not be shamed by having it thought you have fled from your realm ! If you betray yourself now, what will be said ? Think of proving your innocence if—there is any question about the—deed—”

Poor Jehanne felt her brain turning. She was trapped, held fast, and for the moment completely bereft of arguments.

She sat down again, faint and sick with horror.

Bertrand, having safely worried the key from the door into his cuissart-pouch, stepped to the table, and lifting the cup held it to her lips as if she were a child. Choking with her anger and distress, her throat was parched, and she drank deeply, reckless of the strange taste of the wine.

“ When Amaury comes, you can talk with him,” soothed Bertrand. “ Then you can return to Naples

and do your will. But I put my hands in his, and swore to aid him in the matter—I am bound by my oath, my Queen.”

“You are my vassal before his ! Disloyal hound ! For the last time I bid you free me ! ”

Bertrand set down the cup and knelt to her.

“Majesty, I implore you to keep calm till Amaury comes—Then you can ask my head of him if he fails to persuade you that what was done was inevitable, and needful for your good ! It cuts me to the soul to feel your wrath ! And if you are not safe when he comes, I shall be slain by him, and you—but enough ! You must come quietly and safely with me. All will yet be well.” He talked on, persuading, entreating, to gain time, for he noted with relief that her breaths were longer drawn. Presently she checked a yawn.

Then she tried to rise and sank back again, the sleep gaining her limbs.

“Treacherous beast ! ” she cried, with a final effort. “You would slay me ! Out of my sight ! I will at least die alone ! Hence ! ”

She fell across the couch, and Bertrand gently lifted and straightened her out upon it, throwing over her a silken rug with deliberate care, heedless of her furious eyes and clenching fingers.

“Lie quiet, my Queen ! I shall not risk vexing you again during all the voyage ! ” he said tranquilly enough. “If you wish to come up on deck, your guards will warn me, and I will keep out of your sight. Mary, aid me, I cannot face your wrath again.”

Jehanne tried to speak but the sleep gained her, and with closing eyes she saw a little brown

Provençale maiden come in, and heard Bertrand say to her :

“ You will watch Madame the Countess all night, and attend her every want ! ”

Then the sleep sank down, and she knew no more till day.

The noon-day sun shone in through the cabin ports before Queen Jehanne awoke to the new day. When the full consciousness of what had happened overnight rushed back upon her, she lay and moaned to herself.

Then from the dark thought-whirl came one great thought. Andrea was dead ! Swift behind it came another—Was she held guilty ? Bertrand’s words last eve were some comfort. She sorted them out in her mind. “ There were twenty others of us in it ! ” Yea, so there were, and she Jehanne had been their tool ! Could she blame herself so much as she had done, argued her saner, daylight reason ?

Yet how would the others confront Naples, and their Hungarian accusers ? She fell on her knees, and covered her eyes from the sunlight.

Then suddenly came a strange thing. As she knelt there on the borderland of swooning, the mist before her brain seemed to clear away, and she was leaning from her window over the sunny terrace of Castel Nuovo, and Foulquet le Courtois’ cheerful face looked up ; she heard once more the refrain of a little song he had sung :

“ Ma douce amie, le temps se passe !
L’ombre ne dure pas toujours,
De tout filet le fil se casse.
A toute peine arrive le secours ! ”

And in that flash rose another face—that of Louis !

Louis ! She heard once again his certain voice, saw his tranquil, reassuring farewell smile !

“ When I return thou wilt be free ! ”

It was like a powerful elixir to her soul, and it seemed to wash the bloodstains of terror of the last few terrible hours from her. She began to pray very fast. Counsel seemed to come to her in that prayer, and she who had sunk down Jehanne, the overwrought hunted woman, rose up Jehanne the Anjevine warrioress, ready to front her foes right royally. She saw how she had been led by Amaury, clear as in a mirror—she knew that she must cease to lament, to accuse herself. If she had not given her barons power even for the capture, they would have done it despite her ! So much Bertrand’s hasty admissions had revealed. Need she then torture herself so much ?

She had seen Amaury in his true light last night, and she could not think now that she had done amiss in trifling with him, seeing how he had been swaying her to gain his own murderous ends.

Power ! That had been his love—not her ! But she owned Love of the True now—Louis ! She smiled with a joy nothing could cloud—until she noted the locked door of her cabin, and knew herself prisoner to Amaury still. But she would foil him—she would escape ! Bah ! What was Amaury, to one like Louis ? Louis would be told by some one, or would himself discover her plight, and then— Eh, by the Furies ! When once she was free again, Bertrand and Amaury should know what Anjou’s anger meant ! But then she began to think of the other plotters, and it set her shaking with sick disgust again. Empress Catherine—Aunt Catherine, and

Filippa—her own Filippa—had been parties to that horror !

She sat there and turned it all over in her mind till her head reeled, trying to grasp the baseness, the cunning, and ambition which had led the whole pack astray. Marzano ! Even her good old Marzano had joined in, she knew, because from what Catherine had told her of matters, she knew practically all that passed, excepting the veiled Fact that Murder had been intended from the first. Now her full knowledge was a lurid lantern on every point she had wondered about, when they had been telling her before. What use now for her, Jehanne, their poor, trusting fool, to tear her soul with remorse ? This reason was of so much comfort that she began to plot and plan escapes, none of which were possible, seeing that she was alone in the cabin, and that every plunge of the galley was taking her farther from the confusion which must be reigning in Naples.

She knew that whatever she felt inclined to do to punish the plotters she must modify, because though she could slay Amaury, she could not touch the Empress, Charles, or Marzano—nay, nor yet the others !

They were her most trusted supporters—her lifelong friends—and yet they had done this thing ! She gave up thinking about this, and turned to her golden thoughts of Louis once again.

Finette, the little maid, came in and found her smiling an hour after. She was a trim, slim little girl about fifteen, daughter to one of the sailors, who came from Saut du Loup by Grasse, and she served the nameless great lady with infinite respect, unpacking her gowns from the sack so hastily stuffed by

Filippa in terrible Aversa, and bearing in a dainty meal with deft skill.

Soon the pressing question rose in Jehanne's mind :

"Whither in Provence am I bound?" but she dared not ask the girl for various reasons.

So she wrote upon a slip of parchment : "I would go up on deck awhile. I pledge you my word I will not leap overboard. Where are we going?" sealed, and bid her give it to the *Sieur des Baux*.

Bertrand's squire soon appeared with a note equally brief.

"Have your will, Madonna. Garde Joyeuse."

Garde Joyeuse! She remembered a tale of a perfect ogres' hold Amaury owned in Savoy and shuddered, but then collected her courage and followed the squire up on deck.

He arranged a couch for her, and she lay in the sunlight watching the brown sails and rigging flapping in the fresh breeze under the sapphire sky, and the gaily clad sailors with their quaint earrings and gay scarves ran about, and climbed the cordage.

They seemed, as Bertrand said, all Provençaux, and Jehanne sought deeply how she might bribe one to escape once they reached the land.

She thought of the squire, but he was a stolid, rather stupid youth from Toulouse, with no ideas beyond painting a shield or trapping a steed, and so she dismissed him from her mind as impossible, and lay all the afternoon in sheer perplexity, desperately endeavouring not to let her memory seek the past

Meanwhile the galley plunged faster and faster towards the *Alpes Maritimes*, yet the pursuing ship she

was always hoping to spy following them, never showed, and she grew impatient and desperate.

She began not knowing at first how she might use it, to lure the maid Finette into adoring her, with such arts as she was past-mistress in.

By the morning they neared the end of the voyage, Finette fairly worshipped the strange, great lady, and had confided all her little secrets to her. How she was glad to be at Ventimiglia again, as she had a lover, one Matthieu, so smart a lad, who lived with an old mother on the shore below the Château. How he had a boat of his own, for all he was vassal to the Lascaris, and how she hoped to wed him when he had another one, all this Finette told.

The morning they made Ventimiglia, Jehanne, laying in her small trinket casket the few trifles she had brought with her to Aversa, and which Filippa had thrust into the sack along with her robes, found a parchment slip. It was a roundel which Foulquet du Bar had made and given her at Castel Nuovo, just as she was riding out to Aversa. It was a farewell roundel, for Foulquet was starting for his Château at Grasse for a few months; she had thrust it into the bag Sancia carried behind, meaning to read it later.

It inspired her with the thought that if she could but reach Grasse, Foulquet would shelter her against any Des Baux in Provence, and see that she got back to Naples. He at least had nothing to gain from Amaury, she reflected cynically. She turned to Finette.

“Child, would'st be wed sooner?” she asked.

Finette looked puzzled, but assented readily.

“With all my heart, Madame Countess.”

“This gold arm-ring and three more like it are thine

if thou wilt hide me in thy lover's hut. I wish to go to my friend the *Sieur du Bar* at Grasse, and the *Sieur des Baux* wishes to prevent me—for many reasons.

“If thy lover hid me, and told the *Sieur des Baux* that I had fled into the *Alpes*, towards the *Château du Tende*, his men would rush up there, and meanwhile thy lad could take me in his boat to *Antibes*, whence to Grasse is easy. Wilt thou do this?”

Finette nodded.

She had the serf's cool indifference to treachery towards any but her liege lord, and to *Des Baux* she owed no fealty, for her father and she were *Du Bar's* vassals, and trusted to his protection even against *Des Baux's* anger, if she were caught—and Finette was of *Provence* with its cunning.

“You know *Du Bar's* seal?” said Jehanne, showing her *Foulquet's* parchment, which luckily bore a red wax seal, with his crowned lion rampant.

“I cannot read, but that is my lord's mark. I am yours, *Madame Countess*. Now from father I know we are to rest the noon-heat on the shore, and go on to-night. But if your Nobility feigned sickness at being on land again (many are so, even as others are sick at sea) we should stay all night. It would be easy to hide in the hut while *Matthieu* runs crying to the *Sieur's* men that he saw a figure like you running towards the hills—then when they are gone, two of *Matthieu's* friends will set off as if to fish—with your Nobility under their nets!” She beamed at her own easy invention, and Jehanne bestowed upon her a silken kerchief at once.

Jehanne drew round her head a soft Spanish veil, and went up on deck to see the long low shore of

Ventimiglia, behind which towered the mighty Alpes Maritimes, their dark flanks showing majestically sombre in the brilliant gold sunlight. The fresh breeze blew over their soaring peaks and down to the little cluster of fishing huts on the shore, high over which hung the Château of the Comtes of Ventimiglia, or, Provençal, Vintimille, where dwelt Pierre de Lascaris' younger brother. Unluckily Jehanne had never met him, or she could have hoped he would appear on the scene and at her story defy Des Baux; for Bertrand had only about twenty men-at-arms with him, and the galley's sailors, while the Château towered in its force.

Sweet scents of trees and flowers blew from landwards, as if Provence the Golden greeted its Countess. Jehanne felt her spirits rise.

Bertrand came on deck and approached her with embarrassment, but she spoke before he could.

"I see we must journey together now. Thus we had best avoid vital subjects. I shall make your task no harder by pleadings," she said, but with a coldness which made him wish rather that she would have cursed him. "It is needless for the escort to see that we are unfriendly."

He found his tongue with difficulty.

"Madame—I thank you for this courtesy. I also will not sue forgiveness, since I know it useless. Be it as you will, and let simple Provençal baron and lady ride in peace together."

They landed in the galley's small boats, and saw from the Château's lowered banner that the Sieur was absent, whereat Bertrand was glad, since it saved him any inquiries.

"No man could resist stopping me, with such a

priceless charge, even if I do bear the great Seal of Provence," he thought.

Jehanne noted that he wore on his wrist, set in a great gold arm-ring (it was too heavy for a finger), the said Seal of the Seneschals of Provence, the Des Baux' arms, most curiously designed as a heron's head with a gold crown for its collar, and from its beak hung, as a pendant, the Sixteen-Rayed Comet of Des Baux. He must have got this from Hugues—how well the plot had been planned, even to details! she reflected bitterly.

No Sieur from Avignon to Tende would dare check the bearer of that warrant, and she quaked for her chances of escape.

Jehanne's cushions and baggage were brought off, and a place made for her to have a mid-day meal under an olive grove beyond the stretch of yellow sand, and while this was arranging she took Bertrand's arm and walked briskly up and down, saying she needed a stroll. He meanwhile was desperately uncomfortable, but tried to talk of trifles to her.

The Seneschal of the Château sent a squire down to inquire the galley's business there, but he on seeing the Seal merely saluted it, and returned again, after telling Bertrand that the Comte was absent on a surveying ride, but would return home at night.

Suddenly Jehanne sat down, complaining of violent sickness and pain in her side, and Bertrand, in much anxiety, led her to the nearest fisher's hut, bustled to have a couch spread for her, and Finette came running to her. She complained the hut was dirty, so they laid the rugs in a large empty shed used by

the fishers for mending their nets, and here she remained while the long sunny day wore on, till the crimson and purple clouds floated behind the Alpes' shadowy rocks, and the huge gnarled olives began to cast long dusky ghosts on the ground, as the sun sank westwards.

It may be wondered that Finette was not more afraid of Bertrand's wrath, but, mark, she adored Jehanne, and she thought that, so long as she were a friend of her master's, Count Foulquet, this glorious lady might be served unhaltingly. So, to Bertrand's constant inquiries as to how Madame did, she answered always that Madame slept, or was still sick.

Dusk dropped, and, cursing inwardly at the delay, he gave orders to camp on the shore.

The fishers lit a great fire on the shore, and stood a big cauldron of pitch over it to repair two of their boats, while Bertrand's men cooked at ease over a smaller one some yards away.

In the shadows nearer to the sea beyond both blazes a boat was drawn up, which Finette with glee told Jehanne belonged to Matthieu. He, a tall, brown-skinned, merry-faced lad, was lounging about with the others, waiting for darker night ere he gave the false alarm.

Finette turned the lamp out in the hut, intending to go join them by the fire, so that she might presently run to the hut and cry the Countess was absent, and risk them searching below the pile of rugs where Jehanne planned to lie, till all the men should have followed Matthieu's jack-a'-lanthorn cry that he had seen the lady run to the hills.

But Fate stepped in as if to her aid. Torches gleamed on the Château's drawbridge, and darker

specks in the glow showed the Comte and his men had returned, and were winding again down to the shore to greet the strangers. Jehanne spied this through the hole in the shed, and said :

“ This falls well ! The Sieur des Baux and the men will go to meet them. See thou, Finette, I might slip out and hide under the nets in Matthieu’s boat. Go, speak with him unseen and tell him, so that he will tell his friends to search it and declare none is there. Here is the arm-ring. Farewell, good wenchlet ! ”

Finette knelt, kissed her hands in thanks, and with, “ All the saints guard your dear Nobility ! ” slipped away.

Jehanne, her heart leaping painfully fast, wrapped her dark cloak close and crept out on the shadowy shore, now quite deserted ; for Bertrand and his band had gone *en masse* to meet the Comte, and the other fishers also to greet their Seigneur. Jehanne, swift and silent as a lynx, climbed up into the little craft and lay hidden under a pile of nets.

Yet her high-strung senses now made her hearing almost supernaturally sharp, and she heard clearly what passed. A long, shrill cry of dismay rose. Finette acted her part. Then Bertrand’s deep roar, and a quick patter of hooves and feet, told the search was up and the troop alert. Jehanne wondered what Bertrand was explaining to the Comte—perhaps only that she was prisoner to Savoy, but she had more to divert her mind, for now the sailors padded about the boat with silent bare feet. A torch flared above her, through the heavy net-meshes, but she lay perfectly flat, and her cloak was also dark brown, by good hap, and they passed by.

Then Bertrand's voice quite close.

"Little cat, why left you the hut? Where is Madame?"

"I know not, messire. She was gone, 'tis all!" from Finette.

"Search her, men! Bribes oft blind folk!"

"A gold arm-ring, messire! Is this the lady's?" said a man's voice.

Luckless Finette shrieked. Here this damning carelessness undid all! Jehanne pictured Bertrand's straight black brows meeting in a grim line.

"Trust women for wiles. But we will know. Unlid the pitch cauldron, you there!" He paused one moment, an eternity to trembling dumb Finette; then: "Hold her over it, men! Now, little traitress, tell where Madame went, or wear a black gown!"

Mark you, this was the torturing, reckless, brutal Middle Ages, which pardoned any crime to a noble committer—and Bertrand was Grand Justicer of Naples. Two men-at-arms held the fainting Finette over the black steaming mass just from the fire, and to Bertrand's gesture unrolled her long sleeve and held her right arm lower.

"One—two—three—dip!" ordered he, as she bit her quavering lips.

The burning fluid's first touch wrung only one cry from the girl, but that one was a heart-rending, blood-halting cry, and as it died into an agonised moan it found Jehanne's inner heart. She did a sublime thing.

What she held at stake this chronicle may have barely told. Her kingdoms, her pride, her honour, and, most of all, her love, hung upon her escape; but that one child's cry of agony outweighed them all.

Every Anjevine has been a creature of some various impulse ; in King Robert it ran to Quixotism, in Charles of Durazzo to cruelty, and in Jehanne as in her grandsire.

She stood up straight in the boat, and a flame from a falling log showed the tragic group by the fire her stern white face, like some avenging ghost.

“Halt there, Seigneur des Baux ! Your office does not admit of the Question Extraordinary without trial !” she said.

There was not a shut mouth in the whole party, but Bertrand recovered instantly.

“Aha, Countess ! So you wished to leave us ? May I offer you my arm to your lodging ?” he said calmly enough.

She stepped from the boat and swept off ahead of him to the hut, and he, only stopping to snatch a firebrand to relight the lamp, followed her. She turned on him as the light blazed, and he saw she was shaking with rage.

“How long is this to last ?” she demanded. “Think you that I will remain your prisoner any longer than I can help ? You cannot hide a stolen Queen like a stolen dove. I shall be followed—rescued by those more faithful than Amaury—or I will slay myself to evade him ! No man shall hold Jehanne of Naples against her will ! Hear you *that*, vassal ?”

Des Baux winced, for the scorn and fire in this were terrible ; besides, he saw now that he had done a mad thing. If she baulked Amaury and gained Naples, he was a lost man, and even if Amaury prevailed with her, she would never forgive him (Bertrand)

for her ignominious captivity now. He knew but too well that she was implacable for such disobediences. Then if she slew herself in her rage ! Eh, holy Mother ! that was too nightmareish to think of ! Her glorious person dead and buried like some common creature ! Blasphemy ! Yet if he broke oath to Amaury and set her free, then his promised Ministership, the Seneschalty of Provence was lost equally, for the throne would totter surely, if at this crisis Savoy turned rebel. He had, too, the mediæval respect for oaths of the kind, be his other notions of honour what they might. Else he had never kept it thus far. Amaury had chosen his tool well indeed, when he set Bertrand to take Jehanne away thus, for there was no other man in Naples—nay, nor all Italy, I dare say—who could have withstood her supreme persuasions when she applied herself to subdue him. But women formed no part of Bertrand's scheme of things, for, like Empress Catherine, Power was his only idol, and though he held Jehanne the loveliest woman he knew, it was only as some exquisite statue, belonging moreover to another person, that he eyed her. Now that her wrathful fingers threatened to push his Idol from its altar, he was desperate indeed.

“ Oh, Majesty, I cannot break my oath ! ” he stammered, like some little boy.

Her teeth fairly gritted together, and she flung at him but few words :

“ Out of my sight, lest I strike you—fool ! ”

He quitted the hut and sat upon a rock, his head between his hands for a good fifteen minutes. Then he looked up at the stars and unperturbed moon. To his distorted fancy, it had a faint smile on

what children call its "face," for the mountains in it were very clear. This roused him to sudden anger.

"Damn all women!" said the Queen's High Justicer.

CHAPTER XVII

LA VILLA DI TARANTO, at Amalfi, was a pleasant house, pleasantest, perhaps, in its long, low, marble-columned loggia, which overlooked the garden slopes to the lovely Bay below. Upon the twentieth of September, when the noon sun was hot, two people sat upon one carven sandalwood chair in the loggia, and whispered happily in each other's ears.

Presently, at a sound in the house behind, Marguerite slipped from François' knee and made great show of gathering roses from the nearest laden bushes of the garden. In her pale blue brocaded gown, with its deep lace collar and her pearl carcanet, she was changed indeed from the simple jongleuresse ; while he, in primrose sendal with topaz agraffes at throat and wrists, a faint sunburn already on his once pale face, was also a very goodly transformation from the depressed prisoner.

He set to help her by pulling handfuls of heliotrope and smilax from the loggia-pillars ; and then Louis, also in princely array of azure sendal and gold Venetian belt, came out of the house.

" Marguerite cara, have you any cool lemon drink to hand ? " he said, smiling cheerfully. " I have been to see the President of the Republic, and his speeches and the day's heat are alike—dry. The old man had very grave news. He says runners have come in,

telling that a Hungarian army—that which was expected to come for the crowning of the Prince—has indeed arrived, but that it has camped outside the city and is pillaging right and left! No more, and neither of us know what has happened—— Ha, Pietro. Who is't?"

A manservant came out with puzzled air.

"Altezza, a woman from Naples, who will give no name, would see you instantly."

"Bring her hither!" François threw a too full rose at Marguerite, and, as its pink petals rained over her, laughed.

"Confound all kingdoms," he said ruefully. "Let us hope 'tis no ill news."

"We are so happy together here," said Marguerite. "Duenna-less, mistress of our villa, and with my easy Louis for house-mate, 'tis almost as good as being free Rita de Chartres——"

Then to smiling comedy entered grim tragedy. Marek, weary, dusty in her dark travelling mantilla, tottered into the loggia, and would have fallen, but Louis caught and placed her in a chair.

When Marguerite had held a Venetian tazza of cold wine to her lips, she rallied and spoke.

"By your calm faces, you have heard naught! Ah—I scarce know how to begin. Andrea is dead! Dead since the night ere last, murdered by the Queen's barons and Charles of Durazzo!"

"Quick!" cried Louis. "What of Jehanne? Is she safe?"

"Jehanne has gone—gone! Amaury has carried her off. I was there. I saw Andrea dead. The world reels round me, till I find words hardly. See, I had best tell you from the beginning, for clearness."

Her words set the world rocking for all of them, and for a blank moment they stared at each other, ere she collected herself, and told them all as we have seen it.

“I saw Amaury give Jehanne to Des Baux,” she said. “I heard his plan to go to Garde Joyeuse. Then, presently, I climbed up the ivy of the wall, close by the dead Prince, and heard Amaury’s speech within also. He told Durazzo to go to Casaluce, and take Mabrice veiled as his Duchess. Then I crept off to the Convento gate, and saw Amaury bring out the real Marie in Jehanne’s mantle on another horse, for Eblis would not let her mount—and they all set off helter-skelter to Naples. I followed, and, half-way there, they were met by the Queen’s Guard. A man must have gone to fetch it, on the first alarm at Aversa. The Hungarian army had arrived for the coronation about midnight, but had camped peaceably outside Porta Capuana, for no news of the murder had reached them. Amaury’s train from Aversa rode quietly into Castel Nuovo. The Empress had moved in there from Palazzo di Taranto at first news of the Hungarian coming, on pretext of ordering some workmen for the morrow’s ceremonies. The mock Queen got inside, and then somehow the awful news of the hanging leaked out! The town was like a seething cauldron, the riot ten thousand times worse than that at Andrea’s Proclamation as King. Blood ran like the gutters down Larga Correggie. I never saw such fighting—nasty hole-and-corner trap-work, up and down the Vici. Oh, but Amaury was great! He was a lion among the hyenas! He, Hugues des Baux, and Squillace with their men cleared the Larga and Castel of foes in three hours. If Jehanne willed, it would take no persuasion for

the populace to cry him King of Naples, for all the city sides with her, justifies her.

“The Abbot Capece has still got Andrea’s corpse—he will neither render it up for burial nor bury it there—and he cries Murder louder than any foe of them all! Orsini is like a madman, armoured and horsed in the Hungarian camp. Conrad Wolf tried to sack Palazzo di Taranto, and the Greek Guard drove him back. The Empress and supposed Queen are safe in the Castel, but war rages, and the Hungarians cry that the assassins be given up to them. The city’s horrors are too awful for my tongue——”

She broke off abruptly. Louis held the cup to her again, and asked: “How passed you hither, if the enemy are abroad?”

“At Porta Capuana the guard was a good-natured German captain men called Barbarossa, whom I told that I was a wandering fortune-teller, and he, knowing some of my tribe in Hungary, let me pass. Partly also because just then the Seigneur Hugues des Baux came roaring to ask if his daughter Cecile ‘Passe Rose’ had crossed the Porta. From what Amaury once said, I think she had eloped with a young Provençal who loved her. Oh, all Naples is overturned! The once Gay City—the horrors in the Hungarian camps—I came along as on wings. Truly, my love and my hate have lent me them!”

“Where is this Garde Joyeuse?” asked Louis, short as a spear-thrust. “I go there, and you go with me!”

Marek laughed as shortly. “For this I came now. I will follow Amaury and take the Queen from him, if it be to hell. He came last night to fetch some papers I guarded for him, and stayed till dawn. While he slept I slipped off his signet, and in his haste

he missed it not. We must arrive at Garde Joyeuse before him, and enter there, and then by craft you can take Jehanne away. Amaury sails for Provence to-morrow morn ; if you have a ship here, we must take it now and race him ! ”

She sprang to her feet, her vitality quick again, love and jealousy fanning it to blaze sky-high.

“ We must have men with us—how can we get them—unless we take some of the President’s Guard,” cried Louis ; but Marek shook a firm head.

“ The Garde can only be entered by cunning, not force without an army to leaguer it for long—too long for us ! ” she said. “ Take twenty men and no more, but sent to Taranto for troops to follow there if you return not in three weeks or so. Leave all to me—I know my way ! ”

Louis turned upon his sister.

“ Rita, you must go to the President’s wife till I return,” he said. “ I must go rescue Jehanne. There is no other place for you, sith our mother is besieged in Naples.”

But François spoke up. “ Prince Louis, this is a timely moment to make a suggestion,” he said, shyness fighting oddly with suppressed gladness in the tone. “ Your sister and I—er—oh ! ” He grew scarlet and stopped.

Louis smiled, as Marguerite as usual cut the strained knot. She put her arm through François’ as children do before a lecture.

“ Bless us, Louis,” she said, an ecstasy to have disarmed an ogre on her eager face. “ You must have seen how things are with us, unless you were blind.”

“ Benedicite, ma mie ! As ever, you choose an untimely moment for all things ! François is a duke

—wherefor I am thankful, for had he been a jongleur 'twould have gone alike. Like all your other whims, I must perforce say yea ! I have seen too much of our state-unions to refuse your love-match. Eh, carissima ! But even with my blessing, the wedding may dally, for our mother——”

“ Ah, chéri ! ” cut in the wilful Princess, with a smile of sublimest mischief. “ Clever brother Louis ! We thought of that, also, so that last night we bribed Father Paul, to make sure—that to-day I should be the Duchess of Andria ! Kiss me, Louis ! ”

And Louis clasped her, shaking with laughter.

* * * * *

Jehanne never had any clear memories of what happened in the two days after leaving Ventimiglia ; her soul was too anxious to heed very much what was done to her weary body. She had, however, dim pictures of endless mountain-passes with roads of slippery white stones, over which her mule slid and climbed alternately ; of its jolting pace past eyrie-like villages in the distance, through woods of bushy-topped firs, then of torrents white and rushing, with faint blue tinges in their chalky depths—torrents to be crossed by perilous fords.

As the little band got higher, there were patches of last year's snows about in corners. She thought the mountains themselves in league against her. Oh, impossible plight ! Here was a queen prisoner in her own land, and only herself and her captor knew it ! Every mile dimmed her hopes of escape, yet she sat staring ahead into the purple passes, or at the fleecy blue and white Alpine sky, calm and indifferent as the dead to all outward seeming.

Miserable Bertrand watched her for hours as

they rode, studying her perfections as never before, maddeningly trying to guess the tangle's end.

He would have given Amaury body and soul to the devil long before they ended the journey, and could only hope that he and Jehanne might yet agree, and perchance she would then pardon him. He got small comfort from this reflection, however; and meanwhile Jehanne heeded his earnest eyes no more than those of the soaring Alpine hawks, and only spoke to ask for a cloak, or draught of cold water when the sun beat down.

On the second evening, when the border of Savoy was passed, and the scenes wilder than ever, Bertrand reined up beside a roaring torrent in a deep valley, ending in what seemed a solid wall of rock, and pointed upwards.

“La Garde Joyeuse,” he said briefly.

They skirted the torrent, and soon Jehanne saw the wall was a huge Alp, its peak mist-wrapped; but half-way up, on a great shoulder of rocks to the east, were towers of a strong fort, and a great gateway set a dozen yards back from the precipice, but with no visible road thereto.

The Alp was narrow but very tall, and in the valley some distance from its foot a little village trembled from whose square chapel-tower came a fitful alarm-note. The fort was built into the main mountain at the back, and on three sides were sheer precipices from which the side-walls rose straightly, but the road wound to the cliff-foot. There Jehanne saw that there was a deep groove in the rock, and when Bertrand had winded his horn, and another trumpet above had answered it, a sort of wooden cage was let down by four thick ropes.

To this grim black hold Amaury's grandsire, the fierce old Count Humbert, had given mockingly the Arthurian legendary name of "La Garde Joyeuse." Yet it was very valuable to the House of Savoy, situated as it was on the southern border of their fief-nominal, the Comté de Maurienne, and easily reachable from the Italian side, while protected from Provençal invasions by the Comté. Cold and grim as it looked, it held rooms which could vie with the Palais d'Aix in luxury and splendour. The Counts, father and son, had both had a liking for fair guests, so that on all points Amaury had chosen Jehanne's hiding-place exceedingly well.

A wild-haired, slink-eyed lad, in the colours of Savoy stepped from the wooden cage, and with a word to him Bertrand carefully lifted Jehanne from her mule, and begged her to enter. Then the great windlass above wound them up the rock-face till they stood upon the little plateau and entered the gate of Garde Joyeuse itself.

Within it was also sinister and strong. Strange men and women slipped about its corridors and halls—folk with shifty eyes and hands which knew the feel of a poignard better than that of a halberd: Count Amaury knew what he did, when any of his more desperate ruffians got out of hand. He did not hang them; he pardoned them and garrisoned Garde Joyeuse with them! Gratitude and fear of re-conviction together brew fine loyalty. Nowhere did he breathe easier than among them.

A square tower at the south-western corner of the fort contained two rooms one above the other, connected by a spiral stair, both of quaint sexagon shape and right royally tapestried with crimson damask

blazoned with the arms of Savoy. The door of the lower room had an inner door of cast-iron deeply sunk into felted lintels, and an outer one of oak also sound-deadened and iron-hooped, and from it a narrow corridor led to the rest of the fort.

A blazing fire of pine cones and logs, and many costly skins upon the floor warmed each chamber, and every other feminine requisite such as a broidery frame, a lute, a pile of book-parchment, and song manuscripts showed every care for a noble guest had been taken; but Jehanne shuddered as she gazed from the window into the yawning precipice below.

“We shall have snow—that is the chapel-bell to call the serfs from the heights,” quoth Bertrand, with something of an apologetic landlord’s air, as she examined the room.

She looked at him once. “Would an avalanche might sweep this vulture’s nest clear away!” she said; and he went out wordless.

A dark nimble mountain maid, Lucienne, replaced Finette (left behind) at Ventimiglia, but beyond her, Jehanne had no guard but the locked doors; for nothing could leave the fortress without wings, save by the cage, which naturally had sentries at the windlass and machinery-house outside the great gate.

In these rooms, then, Jehanne passed five terrible lonely days.

Her mind became a whirl of anxious thoughts, self-searchings, remorse, wonderings, hopes, fears, resolves—in short, such chaos as would have driven a weaker woman quite mad, but which only tortured her to the verge of frenzy. The worst came on the fourth day, and then she grew calmer again and resolved herself into dumb waiting, which yet was far from a

state of resignation to her fate. Then she screwed herself up to defy the inevitable, if there came no help and Amaury appeared.

“ If I slay him ’twill rid the earth of one villain, hap what may to me,” she told herself. “ Then his men would not kill me, but hold me to ransom. If so I shall be saved ; if not—I die at least true to my Louis ! ”

Then the full knowledge of what she willed to do rushed on her, and she shook with horror at herself. She looked at her hand as if it were stained. “ If—if heaven holds it red with one blood, will it count if I dip it again ? ” she muttered wildly to herself.

These remorseful hours were the worst of all to bear, but she tried to fight them with cooler worldly reasonings. Andrea’s death had been inevitable in any case, but—still her wretched conscience would protest that she might have tried harder to prevent it.

Then again rose a homely Sicilian proverb of Filippa’s : “ Weeping will not mend broken eggshells, so eat the eggs while you may.” This was some comfort to her unquiet mind, and soothed her awhile.

And in long musings the afternoon of the fifth day came.

Then came to her thoughts a plan of trying to persuade Bertrand to free her once more. There must have been much fighting in Naples. If Amaury were slain, and word reached Bertrand, he would be disposed to heed her, and set her free. She had almost abandoned the hope of rescue—she wondered if any one else but Amaury knew whither Bertrand had taken her—a thousand wonderments—and meanwhile the inaction, the captivity were maddening her. In this space she strolled idly to the window and flung

it open, to let more sunlight enter, and leaned out looking down the rock into the valley bottom. Then she gave a great start as she caught her breath chokingly, yet——

Two figures were dismounting from mules by the little shed below—a woman in a mantle, and a tall man whose back-fallen chapereau showed a bright head of hair—a man who suddenly looked upwards——

Jehanne gasped again, and sat down from sheer inability to stand, with the surprise. Louis had come to Garde Joyeuse before Amaury !

How he had come, and who the woman was, she had no idea : if he had an armed force following him, to besiege the Garde—how he proposed to get in and how deal with Bertrand, she asked herself in one hurried question. Then her course was revealed to her in a flash of inspiration.

She would get Bertrand to come and speak with her quickly, and detain him awhile, to see if she could beguile him to letting her out of these rooms into the rest of the Garde. Then if Louis were here on some barefaced pretext, such as his trovereship, she would be able to see him. She whistled Lucienne down from the upper room instantly, and dispatched her to the Sieur des Baux, with the message that the Countess wished to speak with him.

The wild joy at the mere sight of Louis was such that she could hardly contain herself. His coming drove out her fears, nerved her hand, banished every other regret, remorse, scruple.

She looked forth again, but could not spy them as they had walked to the cage's place, only she heard a horn echo up.

Shaking with excitement, she flung herself on a

couch, and watched the roof of the room with its painted stars in a blue sky, waiting for Bertrand to come in, praying he would not go to the gate.

Meanwhile Marek and Louis had left their mules in the shed, and Marek called down the cage with a certain blast upon the horn from his saddle-gear.

They had had fair winds, from Amalfi to Ventimiglia, but they found their ship was not so fast as they hoped. Now they scoured forward, over the slippery mountain roads, for Marek was unquiet, knowing Amaury's light sailing galley to be the fastest thing afloat in the Mediterranean, and she feared being overtaken, even with so much start of him as they had. They had left their twenty men at the hamlet of St. Gilles, a couple of miles off the route from the coast and about four from the Garde, to fit with the plan Marek had made. She and Louis had ridden like the post—two desperate silent folk, each with love at stake, each determined to win or die.

The cage came down, and the page greeted Marek with : " Is it you, madame ? I thought you were the Count. Long Maurice ran in, to say he comes, an hour ago ! "

But Marek did not even start. " Aye, Gaston, he sent us on ahead. Do not tell him we have arrived, as I will play a jest upon him. Into the cage, Messire Vivien ! "

As they went up, she and Louis exchanged desperate looks. Amaury's coming so close spelled extreme danger. But Marek did not waver. She stepped steadily out on the plateau, in the setting sunlight, and smiled at the tall peaks with their white snow, now turned crimson by the light. Amaury's seneschal, a sturdy pippin-faced old war-dog, called behind his

back Blaise Le Louchard, and to his front the Baron de Vence, met them. Marek shook her velvet fur-bound hood backwards easily, as one who returns home, and gave him a dignified hand.

“ Good-day, Baron ! The Count is just behind us, attending to some business which cropped up by the way, but he feared a snowstorm, so sent me and Messire Vivien de Chartres, his new jongleur, on ahead. Pray call me Lucienne if she be still here, and have fires put in my rooms.”

The Baron stared, but knelt and saluted her hand respectfully.

“ Certes, madame ; but as for the rooms—we have another lady here now—a mysterious dame indeed ; knew you not of her ? ”

He said it with annoyance, for he and Marek had agreed very well on her previous visit, and he half feared the strange lady of whom the Sieur des Baux had charge was a possible Countess of Savoy ; and he disliked des Baux’s arrogant airs mightily.

But Marek winked scornfully. “ Oh—she ! Aye, she is only the Sieur des Baux’s affair ! An unwilling heiress, look you, Baron. See here now ! ” She waved her hand bearing Amaury’s gold-crowned-arms-engraved signet, like a wedding-ring, and smiled gaily.

“ She never leaves those rooms—but there are the Count’s, of course. Eh, curse me for a fool ! Take my felicitations, dear lady ! ”

Kneeling, he kissed her symbol of power, and grinned with pleasure. If the Tzigana were indeed the Red Count’s wife, better she than some starched doll of a princess—far easier chatelaine to please.

“ I am fain to play a little jest on my husband, to

serve him out for one he played on me in Naples," she said, smiling at de Vence. "He half scared me to death by hiding in a cupboard and leaping out on me! Do not tell him we have arrived, and I will serve him even so when it grows dark. He will be so anxious also, that I am not here—or he may feign indifference if he suspects. Messire de Chartres, come with me, and hide in his rooms! Then suddenly begin to sing!" She laughed like a child at a good jest, and the Baron laid finger to lips, and grinned genially at her as she ran lightly up the steps of the inner hall, followed by Louis.

"You are a very witch!" whispered Louis to her as they entered Amaury's chamber. "My wit lags long after yours. We have gained a moment for council, but what now? Amaury comes——?"

"Aye, and you must be far hence with Jehanne ere he doth. I marvel where Des Baux is, and if she is strongly guarded. Get you into this great armoire, and I will call Lucienne and find out exactly."

To Marek's whistle Lucienne brought wine and cakes, and said she hoped Madame had had a fair voyage.

Madame replied that she had, and that the Count would come presently, but that he must not know she had arrived as she was going to give him a fright by hiding in the arras and jumping out suddenly.

Then casually she added she supposed the *Sieur des Baux* was here also?

"Si, si, madame," smiled Lucienne. "I heard him singing to the strange lady now. Ah, but she is lovely! Yet so triste—never smiles; and the *Sieur* such a gallant man too, if he is grim——"

Marek smiled back. "Still, she may change her

mind with time. Run away now, and say naught to Monseigneur."

On her going Louis peered from the armoire.

"If Bertrand is with Jehanne, we had best rush into the room, then do you bolt the door while I challenge him to fight. I have every cause, and as for the end—I have yet to meet my match at sword-play. Then—after—we have only to walk tranquilly to the cage, and get down. The walls are thick, the swords make no noise to matter. Yet, you have not told me what you will do when we are gone. Amaury might slay you in his rage. The seneschal having seen me enter, you must tell some story—what?"

"I shall only say you joined me at Ventimiglia with the story that you had ridden at Amaury's command to join me, from Pisa. To Amaury I shall boldly say that I could not live without him, and that I tracked him hither from a sailor's babble on Naples' quay. We have never had wry words yet, for I acted my part too well even while knowing him false. Oh, leave me to cozen him, while you fly with the Queen. I might feign to swoon and say you stunned me and tore the signet from me—time enow! Let us go."

But she blanched, and turned aside to hide it while he was rolling his cloak round his arm and loosening his sword.

Her chivalrous accomplice would never leave her to face the fate she dreaded if Amaury turned against her, and his first wrath did not pass off.

"The White Mercy!" she said to her shuddering soul. "Ugh! 'Tis an evil end!" For the Red Count was here, as in all else, an artist. He never beheaded an evil-doer and the hangman's rope rotted from disuse at Garde Joyeuse. But the victims were

bound hand and foot, stripped to the shirt first, then carried out and laid where a wriggle would send them over the edge of the snowy precipices around the Joyous Hold. They stayed thus three days, and then, if what remained of a human body had a breath left in it, it was cut free to find its way down the all but impossible goat-tracks round the great mountain's flanks. But in all the memories of the quaking peasants of the near villages, there were but two cases of wandering wild-eyed men, who had been of great hardihood and strength, who found a gibbering way to shelter—and then only to die in frenzy.

Such was the mercy of Amaury le Rouge, courtier of Naples, condottiero of Savoy !

But Marek was unflinching in her resolve, to win back her lover, and rid herself of Jehanne, or to take with the steady courage of despair at the loss of the love which was to her more than life, any doom he might deal out to her. Her passion devoured all fear, and dug her cunning deep. Armed by these fierce desires, she had brought her rival's lover to her aid, for to Jehanne herself she bore no hate, knowing how matters stood with her and Louis. Together with him now, she went along the narrow passage leading to Jehanne's tower, but even as they tried the outer wooden door softly, a sound came along which sent his hand to hilt, and drove Marek deadly pale. Cheerfully it came—a man's voice, lilting a little song, to the tune of spurred heel on the stone floor !

A little chamber, no bigger than an alcove, made for storing arrows and bolts for the tower's defence in siege, opened a providential door at the turn of the passage, lighted dimly by an arrow-slit only. Marek

threw her arms about Louis, and lifted him into its gloom by sheer force, just as Count Amaury came along and fitted a key into the inner iron door. But even as that door swung open, Louis, despite her struggles, leaned from the shelter's angle, and saw clearly right over the Red Count's shoulder what passed in the inner chamber.

CHAPTER XVIII

“ Entre la bouche et le verre
Souvent le vin tombe à terre.”

NOSTRADAMUS.

THE delicate Italian lock of Jehanne's prison-room clicked faintly, and Bertrand des Baux entered, rather flushed and ill at ease ; but she instantly held out her hand for him to kiss, and backed the favour by :

“ I am half crazed with loneliness ! We have quarrelled long enough, so I sent for you to sing to me while poor Lucienne goes out for fresh air on the walls. She may have it, if I may not ! ” rather mockingly, as he relocked the door.

She strolled to the window humming a refrain, the pliant folds of her long robe trailing and swaying with every supple movement as she went. Bertrand eyed her keenly down from golden circlet over bronzen plaits to scarlet slippers below the gown hem. She sat on the couch, and pushed him a tabouret with her foot, then reached her lute from the table near.

Her smooth manner relieved him mightily, and as he deemed rescue so very impossible, he had no fears of its veiling more.

“ Sing me that little canzone of Foulquet's, the one beginning :

“ Ma douce amie, le temps se passe,”

she demanded ; and he complied.

He had a good voice, and though he rarely used the lighter side of Trouverey, in his Sicilian campaign he had been a famous troller of camp ballades. Jehanne's eyes were glittering uneasily, but her face was in shadow; as the passionate hopeful words ended her lips parted with pleasure.

"Thank Heaven for song! 'Tis the one pure thing we have left from Paradise! Such canzones make me forget all my woes. This has tuned me to sing you somewhat also. It may startle you——"

She sang, but at the first verse his fists were clenched, his cheeks hot, for it was the plaintive Prison Song of Richard of Anjou in his Austrian dungeon, the piteous entreaty of each line intensified tenfold.

"Qu'ils sachent bien mes hommes, mes barons,
Que pour argent n'ouvrissent leurs prisons
Point ne les veux taxer de trahison—
Mais suis deux hivers pris!"

He sprang up, smarting under the accusation in the tone, but her raised hand checked him, and she sang on, every note liquid with tears:

"Dans un captif plus d'ami, plus d'argent!
Plus que ses jours ils épargnent l'argent!
Las! que je me sens douloir ce torment!"

Her head dropped, and as she raised it, tears filled her imploring eyes.

"Qui sauvera le renom de ma gent?"

Then sudden hope crept back, tender and sweet:

"Pourtant mon cœur je sens se rassurer—
Si je l'en crois, mes fers vont se briser!"

Plainest meaning was in her glance. A sterner man than he might have responded, yet he sat down

breathing heavily, without speaking; and she sang the last sad

“ Car suis deux hivers pris ! ”

“ I might as well try to move an Alp ! ” she thought, but leaned forward and touched his shoulder.

“ Richard said truly of his barons—fair faced in smooth times, but in rough—traitors ! So are mine ! ”

Bertrand growled rather than said :

“ Les Saintes Maries ! Were it any but you, Majesty—— ! ”

She smiled her most wonderful smile.

“ Then I thought rightly ! It is only your oath to Amaury which makes you traitor to me ! I did but test you now, for I pride me I can read my men truly, and thus I read you—Answer me ! ”

He hung his head slightly, and to see his face she leaned forward, her hand gripping his shoulder till he felt her pulses throb through his cotte hardie, and a loose curl of her scented hair brushed his very cheek. He coughed sharply, and strode to the window and back, as if unable to keep still. Jehanne saw his wavering.

“ Ah, Bertrand, be not the first Des Baux, who was traitor to Anjou ! Trust your Queen—I ever deemed you my friend—show me that I was right ! Free me—I will double aught Amaury may have promised you ! ”

She was growing desperate to be out at least into the Garde, and she braced herself into a harder effort.

“ I always trusted you, Bertrand—trust me now ! Free me ! Ah, I implore ! ”

She rose, held out her hands to him, her tears streaming fast.

The Grand Justicer found a Queen's tears worse to endure than her rage, and in his desperate embarrassment found no better course than to put one arm round her in the awkwardest, half-caress possible. He was so masculinely helpless with a weeping woman that she could have laughed had she not been strung up to such anxious tension, and then as he drew her closer smiled up at him suddenly, with her most alluring, persuasive, enchanting smile of all. Its effect upon the hitherto grim cold soldier was both magical and disastrous, and she gasped at the quick change in his look as sharply he bent over her—with surprise, longing, and the very dawn of hot feeling mingled therein.

He dared not kiss her, so strong was his old mail of caution, and awe of her, even while he held her so, and she felt the arm which held her fairly tremble, as she smiled again, and murmured very low :

“ Ah, trust me !—and free me, Bertrand ! ”

His arm tightened about her suddenly, and in its close clasp her hand fell down by his side, and quite by accident touched his poignard hilt, even as his hesitating lips neared her forehead, timidly, yet as if compulsorily. But even the magic of her upraised mouth so near his own could not drug the soldier's instinct so long dominant in him, and instantly Des Baux had recovered from his momentary lapse towards gallantry.

His rage rose swiftly as the storm-wind whirls up on his native Plain of Arles, and in a second he had her by the shoulders, and held her away from him, as a man holds a cat which has scratched.

The angry surprise which flamed in her face he misread like the touch on the hilt, as springing from a guilty cause.

“So you would have glamoured me for treachery, would you? Soul of St. Magdalen! You can fool a man once too oft—I am no foolish Amaury taken in by your cursed love-sorceries! I am a match for any cozening jade alive! Hear truth for once, Queen Jezebel! Witch! Hussy!”

Too stricken by astonishment to try to check his furious rush of words, she stared dumbly at him, and just then the key turned silently in the door without, and as she faced it she saw what of all things was least expected. There, with his red surcoat splashed, and his mail shirt rusted by the sea, and a frown like a thundercloud on his brow, stood Amaury!

Something irresistible seemed to draw her gaze past him, and lo, in the passage beyond him she saw Louis—Louis, a glow of triumphant love in his eyes.

Any ordinary man under circumstances so amazing, would have leapt forward, or cried out, but Louis of Taranto grasping as was usual with him the situation with almost supernatural quickness, did the one prudent thing—a thing so simple that only a strategical genius like he would have been calm enough to do. He made her a vehement sign of silence, and slipped into hiding behind the door's heavy silk curtain.

Amaury, conscious only of the pair before him, listened a second as Bertrand berated Jehanne with the fluency acquired in many camps, and then unheard upon the wolfskin rugs, he crossed the

room, and dropped a grimly ironical hand upon his shoulder.

In the brief moment of open-mouthed surprise which followed, Jehanne glanced at the curtain over Amaury's head, and there saw Louis look forth and make her with his hands the rapid pantomimic signs of two men fighting and some one running away—Half understanding, she made a plan.

As Bertrand released her arm, she turned, and with a hoarse little cry, threw herself right upon Amaury's heart.

"Amaury! Save me!—He—Oh, Madonna mia! His lips had touched mine——!"

Des Baux, too overwhelmed at this thunderbolt of invention, spluttered a wild moment, and stood mute as a carp.

Amaury held her an instant, oblivious of all else. "O Jehanne, mon cœur——" he said, a world of tender joy in his voice, "At last I come!"

Then like an arrow's barb, her last meaning bit into his brain.

Deliberately he put off her arms, and drew his sword.

"Eh, false steward of mine! I ask for no explanations—only guard you, now!"

Mechanically at the taunt, Bertrand's blade leapt out also, but the action loosened his tongue.

"Hold, Amaury! She lies, for she tempted me to free her, and weakly I held her a moment——"

With a shriek Jehanne drowned his voice.

"Will you hark to his lies before my word, Amaury? You saw him seize me——"

Amaury's mind heated to the whitest glow of anger, argued nothing; he only wished to be rid of Bertrand,

to slay him, as the last impediment which kept him from Jehanne, and really if his feelings be analysed, it was more impatience to be rid of him, than resentment, he was so sure of her love by the greeting she had given him.

Bertrand's frantic attempt to clear himself, he judged the natural lie of a man in his place ; and he doffed his cloak quickly.

Des Baux, however, threw down his sword with a last wild appeal to reason.

"God ! Amaury ! We cannot fight so—you have your mail on you—Hear me ! She lies——"

Amaury laughed, rolled up his cloak, and threw it at his head.

"There is cause, if you need one ! Not another word. Here, Jehanne ma mie, pray loose my mail on the shoulder, so that I may end this liar's bragging."

Jehanne looked at them desperately, feeling like some puppet drawn by wires against her will. If she stopped the fight, Louis would be discovered, if she let it go on they might kill each other—but even while she halted she looked up, and saw Louis smiling quiet approval at her, and holding a beckoning finger towards the door. The others, deadly intent on their preparations noticed nothing, nor turned that way, as he kept peeping out. She looked at Louis and made her choice. He was the only thing of any consequence in the whole world ! Let fools like Amaury and Bertrand fight ! The strong frenzy of love rushed upon her like the Moslem's battle-fury and made her invulnerable to all other thoughts or falterings.

She undid Amaury's mail, and but for its clink on the floor, there was dead silence, for miserable Bertrand subsided into hopeless quietude, and truly, any man would have done alike, when fronted with the fierce devil which was loose in Amaury's eyes just then.

The swords snapped together in that little rasping tune of steel which has been so many men's death-prelude in the ages of blade play, and still Jehanne watched them dart with that oddly helpless fascination binding her. Then she looked at the curtain, and saw Louis quick and silent as a ghost slip out, and into the passage mouth, beckoning imperiously to her.

Bertrand had desperation in his point, and Amaury had his impatient haste, and just as his blade bit slightly into Des Baux's left shoulder, Jehanne shifted her stand and got towards the door, unheeded of either as they stamped to and fro, in that absorption of darting, flickering steel. She drew back, and back—and gaining the threshold, stepped out—and was caught in Louis's arms !

Then, with a quickness that seemed sleight of hand, Marek slipped forward, pulled the door to, and shot its heavy bolts upon the duel within. Then she flitted away, leaving them gazing at each other with joy too deep for mere words, and which made them momentarily utterly reckless of the danger which lay all about them.

Louis broke that magical silence, as presently Jehanne disengaged herself from his arms, and tried to frame a sentence.

“ Ruby life-Star of mine, I have kept my word, and am returned—and thou art free ! ”

“ Louis, I tried to save Andrea at the last ! I was too late—I felt guilty, yet heaven knows I am not ! ” she said very rapidly, and he answered only by a long kiss upon her lips.

Marek was back again, a fur mantle and Jehanne’s shoes in her hand.

“ You are saved, comrade ! ” she said to Louis. “ Fear naught, for here is Amaury’s signet, which you have only to show to the varlet of the lift, and so quit the Garde unquestioned. You have only to mount the mules in the lower stable there, and so ride for Ventimiglia—thence plain sailing to Nice where the Château is safety for you both——”

“ What of you ? Amaury will break out of there ! ” said Louis hastily.

“ Leave him to me ! Only haste away now—Queen Jehanne, my unconscious rival, God speed you, I pray with whole soul, for your coming and going have given me my life’s desire ! Prince Louis will tell you all my story as you ride—but now haste away ! ”

She was quivering with high excitement, her face burned, while the hands with which she clasped Louis’s in farewell were cold as snow.

Jehanne, having no time for questions, had perforce to content herself by saying a few words of thanks, which she knew for inadequate, but which Marek smilingly cut short, and waved her away towards the Courtyard.

A few busy pantlers and men-at-arms were all the people they met on the way to the gate, and there on showing the ring, the guard passed them promptly to the lift, which was lowered to the rock-foot, near

which in the stable stood always saddled six mules and three jennets.

A silver piece and the sight of the ring made the groom bring out two of the latter without question, and then Louis lifted Jehanne into saddle.

“For the first time, my Queen, I may set you on your throne!” he said smiling, as he vaulted into his own saddle and turned his steed’s head southwards up the pass.

The last rays of the sunset flamed up splendidly in the west and lighted Queen Jehanne’s radiant face, as she rode beside him.

“And dearer to me is this humble seat than my siege of Naples now!—because my King has placed me thereon—But we shall share that of Naples together most joyfully, my Louis, my King—for seeing that you give me back my throne, my crown is fair exchange is it not?” she said softly.

“Give me but yourself, my Queen Jehanne!” answered Louis, as they galloped towards their kingdom and safety.

* * * * *

Marek waited only till she saw the two mounted figures vanish in the gathering dusk up the pass far below, and then turning from her battlement, she ran down the passage to the door of Jehanne’s prison.

Faint thuds sounded from within—cries muffled.

Then suddenly her overwrought brain gave way. She became possessed with the fear some one would hear, come and open the door, let out Amaury—and that Jehanne would be pursued—brought back.

This thought surging in her brain, set her running back to the plateau by the lift, her hair and veil streaming fantastically. Drawing the long, keen knife from her belt, she slashed through the tough hemp of the lift-ropes over their great pulleys like cotton, and as they coiled down the rock's face to the valley, she shrieked with mad laughter.

It would take some hours to rig a fresh lift to lower sufficient force for pursuit, and meanwhile only winged things could leave Garde Joyeuse. But as the last rope gave, it jerked the engines in the little machine house, and the man in charge rushed out, and saw——

His alarmed shout roused the Baron de Vence from his walk on the wall.

“What have you done, Countess?” he cried amazedly. “Where is Monseigneur? Fetch him some one! The Countess is not well!”

Marek laughed strangely, and then as she thought unseen, pulled a small bright thing from her bosom and threw it over the precipice, but De Vence marked it, and started at her air of frenzy.

“Get rams and levers, men, and cast about! Madame is—unwell. She has perchance locked up the Count. Pray come away from the ramparts, madame. You may turn giddy——”

Her frenzy was passing, and quiet as a lamb she went up into Amaury's room, and stayed there during the two hours which it took them to break through the double-door behind which Amaury waited in impatient fury.

The lintels were so deep and sound-deadened, that it was not until the second door gave way that any

voice could penetrate, to command or explain, while Marek to all De Vence's expostulations only returned that odd Judith-like smile.

At last the door broke, and Amaury and Bertrand (nursing a slight cut in one arm, but otherwise scatheless) bounded into the little group of men.

"Hell and the fiend! Where is the Countess? What folly is this of hers?" cried Amaury.

"Which of these precious Countesses do you mean?" asked De Vence sulkily. "One Countess—she the *Sieur des Baux* brought hither—has left the *Garde* with your *jongleur*, showing your signet to the *lift-varlet*. The other, *Madame Marek*, is above, as mad as may be! She rushed out and cut the *lift-ropes* and threw a key over the rock. I am tangled up with women and you! Solve me the mystery, *Monseigneur*."

"My *jongleur*? What means that?" asked Amaury hastily.

"He came hither with *Madame Marek*," replied De Vence.

Amaury waited for no more, but twisting him out of his way, dashed along the passage to his room.

Marek met him with extended arms, smiling happily.

"Amaury, my life! She is gone, beloved—and thou art wholly mine now!"

"*Jehanne* is gone? How? What in hell mean you? Explain, or——" He seized her by the throat, like some dog one will choke.

The terrible shock put back some of her scattered senses, and she stammered, "You loved *Queen*

Jehanne!—I knew, I heard you say it, sleeping—in Naples, and so I rid myself of her—I did it for thee, my husband. She never loved you—she is with her lover now. Let her go!”

“Her lover?” Furiously he drew his dagger and held it to her throat as if he could hold his huge fury no more; but she went on, never heeding the peril.

“Her lover, Prince Louis of Taranto. He came hither with me, and enticed her to leave the room while you fought. Ah, beloved, why look so at me—me thy wife!”

He stood there wrath incarnate, his whole world of ambition and passion crashing about his ears. The greatness of its ruin no words can paint. He had done murder for possession of Queen Jehanne, had held her and the crown in his very grasp, and now the feeble hand of his deluded mistress had turned all to dust in the very hour of his triumph!

Was it too late even now to recover Jehanne? If he could but overtake her, and this Prince of hers escaped his fate, then might the devil grip him afterwards! He spurned Marek with his foot as she knelt before him, where she had fallen as his clasp of her throat relaxed.

Then he laughed—a laugh which brought Bertrand running, sure that murder was being done.

“Ha, Bertrand! We did well to cease our fight, it seems, for we should have slain ourselves for a jade! The puppet Queen has been too clever for us after all! It turns to farce. She had another card concealed all the while! What will the Empress say? Her damnable son Louis has won the game,

and left us gaping ! But we will hold them yet—let Queen Jehanne try to re-enter her Naples without the aid of Savoy ! Let this poor Prince try to sit on its burning throne ! He may have glamoured Jehanne awhile, but she is mine—mine at soul ! ”

Then desperately Marek played her last cast, and told what was surely the most astounding lie of all.

“ Amaury—Amaury, hear me ! Jehanne has loved this Louis for over a year ! For his sake she let thee kill Andrea. Even now Empress Catherine is proclaiming her son King in Naples. It was for this she told thee to seek Jehanne thyself here, while this is being done. She sent me hither with Louis ! Now kill me if thou wilt ! ”

She clasped his knees, closely, desperately, as a doomed spirit sticks to its hold on life, yet she feared death less than his loss.

He looked at her, a terrible smile on his lips.

“ And you did aid Louis of Taranto to bear Jehanne hence ? ” he said. “ Well, Marek, you will find the snow kiss colder than I ! ”

“ Oh, adored, I did it all for thee ! ” she shrieked in terror. “ Life to me is nothing without thee. Here I will not stay to endure it ! ” She leapt up suddenly, and tore Bertrand’s knife from his belt ; but before she could drive it into her breast, Amaury snatched it away and threw it across the room.

His old love for her sprang up, and cried him halt in his fury, and he clasped her passionately, and kissed her shaking lips, as he spoke to Bertrand, who stood staring at him, utterly at a loss for words.

“So! Better faithful gipsy than cold Queen, it seems! For the nonce I keep Marek, but later we will have our revenge on Naples and Jehanne. Savoy is thorough either in love or hate!”

Des Baux left him caressing Marek's jetty hair.

AN AFTERWORD

MAÎTRE ANSELME, wizard and small gentleman of Provence, sat on his garden terrace overlooking the Baie des Anges and the fair city of the Alpine Eagle Flottant, Nizza la Bella.

The towering Château rose above his little white-walled villa, and below its garden were aloe-grown rocks sheer to the road which wound round the base of the Château Hill to Port Lympia, and westwards towards Cagnes.

Fair to Maître Anselme's gaze stretched the curved bow of the sweeping of the Baie, its tip formed by the Cap d'Antibes, green as jade with its trees, beyond which the smoky blue of the Esterels bounded the sky-line. The clamour from the red-roofed city below him, and the splash of the pearly surf softened by distance made music in his ears, and the garden's roses and jessamines were sweet as incense in the sunlight, but their master had no leisure for their beauties that day—only for the slip of parchment he held.

A strange man was Maître Anselme, and many held him a dangerous ; but he had the high protection of the Crown, in shape of a grant to study "All arts whatsoever" from the hand of King Robert, which was made doubly safe for him, by the close presence of his friend the Sieur Guillaume Feraud de Thoramenes, Viguier de Nice, in the Château above.

Maître Anselme was dreaming a strange day-dream which sent his thoughts backwards nineteen years. Nineteen years of mysterious waitings, watchings, and communions with the Unseen at his royal master's biddings—they rolled up like a scroll from his memory, and he seemed to stand again at Castel Nuovo, in Torre Thalassi, in a dusky room hung with garlands, and see King Robert eager and anxious at his side.

The weary Princess Marie de Valois slept in her state bed and the nurse softly rocked the ivory cradle near by, which held the new-born twin hopes of Naples.

“Tell me, Anselmo,” the King was saying. “What is the fate of my son’s eldest maidling? She whom we are calling Jehanne whose eyes are as infant stars?”

And Anselme heard once more his own strange reply—a reply which came to him from Those Who Are Without, and which he then did not understand himself: “Sire, her fate is bound by four Links—A.L.I.O!”

“A.L.I.O? Explain! Most mystic saying!”

“Sire, they cannot be explained now, yet I will try to See in the Mirror.”

Then this memory passed, and there was a gap of years.

Another picture rose, of King Robert coming to his little house in Naples announcing joyfully, “Our riddle is partly read, Anselmo mio. I have affianced our Jehanne to young Prince Andrea of Hungary. A! There it is!”

“A, my King, but what of L.I.O.?”

“Her children’s names, perchance?”

But Anselme dared not add more to the King’s

solution. He had seen That in his Mirror which would not bear explaining.

But when King Robert was laid in Santa Chiara, many in Naples asked why the Astrologer-Royal packed up his gear and left for his old home in Provence. To such he said that he grew old, and the white soil of his beloved Liguria called him away, but in truth he dared not stay to see the good King's cherished kingdom ruined by its enemies, nor Jehanne's sorrows with Andrea.

Yet now he smiled at the parchment signed with its firm "J." gladly. "She comes to ask my Sight," he murmured to the sunny air. "My Sight—and I pray it may be better than I fear. O Queen of Fourfold Destiny, will you quail at what you may see, or are you fearless as I think you?"

There was a sound in the villa loggia, and he mounted the steps, his black velvet robe contrasting artistically with its gold cincture of Greek broidery and his crimson leather shoes.

Queen Jehanne stood there, on the loggia's marble floor, and held out her hands eagerly to her old friend, her eyes a-glow with a wonderful joy. Her radiant happiness lit her whole person as a flame shines warmly through a once cold alabaster lamp, and one glance at the tall gallant figure behind her told Anselme all her tidings, before her lips could rapturously frame words.

"Messire Anselme, this is my husband, Prince Louis of Taranto!—King of Naples, when I have him there again!" she cried all in a breath, and laughing like a chime of joy-bells. "My true husband—not merely my Consort!"

"Aha—L!" murmured the Astrologer to himself.

“Your very new husband, my Desire!” smiled Louis. “Messire, you must feel honoured by my royal spouse’s affection for you! Thus, on the third day of our wedded life she insists upon visiting you——” Jehanne struck in eagerly as a child to be first with the news:

“The Hermit of Chateauneuf, Father Reynier, united us three days ago—but we are going to keep this bond secret, and be wed twice, again with full pomp and procession, by dear Philippe de Cavaillon; but we deemed it best to make our union secure ere any more terrors could part us, and it would take the Holy Father’s own power to dissolve Father Reynier’s knot now. But we knew that you will keep silence, and the Sieur de Thoramenes knows nothing beyond that we arrived at the Château together, fleeing from my capture by the Count of Savoy—oh, ’tis a long story, but you shall hear it all anon——”

Anselme smiled and lifted a warning hand.

“My Queen, very little of present happenings are hidden from the old Seer of Secrets,” he said. “I knew that you had been in great peril, but would escape. This by the Sight I knew, but by human agency I had heard of Andrea’s death, for last night a swift galley brought word from Naples to the Viguiers—but only that his barons had slain him. Of your absence no word was said.—How now?”

As he spoke a page in the De Thoramenes colours came out upon the loggia and fell upon one knee before Jehanne, tendering a silken bag sealed with the seal of Constantinople.

“The Viguiers prayed me to give this to your Highness,” he said. “A galley has but just come in with it.”

Jehanne trembled with excitement as she read the letter. It was written in Empress Catherine's own hand, and ran :

“BELOVED NIECE,—What you may have arranged with the Count of Savoy, I know not, but am very sure that I may trust you (as ever) to do what is best for your kingdom, and your happiness. The Count will have told you how he and Roger Sanseverino, and Marzano, and my feeble self, have swept your hearth clear of your foes, and silenced your accusers, and of how your sister Marie wears your veil and state till your return. When this will reach your hand I know not, but as Savoy told me to address all scripts to Nice as your nearest castle to his stronghold, I send this thither, and Marzano unites with me to pray you return right speedily, as Naples is clamouring for you to enter it in triumph, and hold rejoicings over the driving out of the Hungarians (who are encamped at Capua and ravage the neighbourhood), and though Marie makes a fair Queen Jehanne veiled, she dares not play the part openly. I have very much to say to you, but not on parchment, so with my greeting to the Count of Savoy, and my dearest embracings for you, I am, your most loving Aunt,—CATHERINE.”

Louis and Jehanne had read it, shoulder to shoulder, and now looked at each other and smiled the smile of infinite relief.

“Our road home is clear, beloved,” said he. “But my loving mother will have to welcome another nephew by marriage than the one she had expected ! Cautious stately dame ! Observe, my dearest, how she words the letter, so as to fit whatever may have

befallen between you, strife or love. And how she and Marie have saved your flight from becoming known to the people. Picture her joy when she knows the truth—that I, Louis, am your spouse ! ”

Jehanne clasped her husband's arm and smiled with the girlish gladness of her old self, the self which lived and laughed before the coming of Andrea for the second time, as she turned to Anselme.

“ Show us somewhat of the future, messire,” she said ; and he looked at her and sighed, for the Knowledge of such dealers in the Unseen, as he, weighs heavily at times.

“ You are happy now, my Queen—why ask me more, for you have your High Desire beside you ? Still, if you must see, come hither, but blame me not ! ” as she protested with hasty gesture against his hesitation.

Above Anselme's villa rose a little white belvedere, the top storey of which was a small round room, and from the flat roof he could observe the stars and make his calculations at ease. The lower part was a larger room full of his books and instruments of science.

The upper room, however, was hung with black velvet, and lighted by mere arrow-slits, and unfurnished save for a tall lamp-stand and four stools, set in a row before a mirror about six feet square, with strange, dim, polished surface, where weird shadows always flickered.

Louis and Jehanne sat down before the black curtain which now covered it, and Anselme first darkened the loopholes, and then lighting the green-shaded lamp he took a powder in a tiny brass dish, and with a splinter of wood lighted it and drawing back the curtain flung it full in the mirror's face in a small

shower of sparks. Then he knelt as if in prayer a moment, and repeated his action. A sudden steam clouded the mirror which glowed as if lighted from behind, and then it cleared quickly and the beholders saw a picture distinctly appear. The great roof of the Cathedral of San Gennaro rose above a gorgeous crowd of knights, ladies, and priests in every kind of splendid array—so clearly that Jehanne thought she heard the music roll, felt the mounting incense, as she saw.

A figure like herself, wearing the ruby velvet of Naples' royal mantle over a white silken robe, mounted the altar steps and knelt in prayer before it. Then clear in the streaming sunlight from the high windows came a counterfeit of Louis, kingly as Charlemagne, dazzling as the sun, in a long robe of cloth of gold, under a crimson mantle brodered with the Cross Flory of Anjou, and knelt beside her visionary self at the altar.

It was so vivid, that she clasped Louis the Real the tighter, as she gazed spellbound, as the picture moved, and three priestly forms magnificent in vestment and bearing came forward. She knew one for Cavaillon, and he held high the Crown of Naples—her crown which she had striven to keep so long and bravely. And the Bishop bent forward and laid it upon Louis's head! The Prince Consort of Naples was made King by his wife's wish and crowned by her Love!

The visionary Louis, however, beckoned to a figure like Guy de Montleon, who held a small, plain crown upon a cushion. Then with a superb dignity he took the Crown of Naples from his head and placed it upon his wife's, then lifting the smaller circlet put it upon his own.

Jehanne's spirit leapt forward strangely, and dis-

tingly she heard him say : " My Queen has had me crowned King of Naples, yet the Crown is hers, for the Queen rules the King ! We reign united in our very souls ! "

And at the chivalrous action of the King, came a roar as of ten thousand applauding voices, and the mirror clouded for a moment.

Before Jehanne could speak or wonder, another picture rose.

It showed Larga Reale crowded with revellers, Palazzo di Taranto and the Porta wreathed with garlands and banners, as the royal train swept under it. Jehanne saw herself on Eblis, and Louis on his white charger beside her, girt with his sword as for battle and clad in a white velvet tunic, gold brodered on the breast with the Holy Dove and its halo. His neck bore a strangely twisted gold cord, tied in a true lover's knot, and in front of his barret chapereau with its small gold coronet the knot was repeated. A wreath of flowers fell from a house balcony by the Palazzo—struck Louis's steed, which reared wildly. As it fell backwards he vaulted lightly down, but his leap shook off his chapereau, and the crown falling from it, broke into three pieces on the ground ! Jehanne watching breathless saw him smile and remount, just as the picture faded in the Mirror. As the visionary Louis passed, the real Louis clasped his wife the closer as silently they gazed at the fascinating dark surface of the glass. Sunshine glowed therein, and they saw the Terrace of Castel Nuovo with its white statues and diamond-jetting fountain in the warm air.

From the long window skipped joyously a tiny figure, of a dear little fair-curved girl of perhaps six or seven, and Jehanne's heart leapt suddenly. Was this

her child—Louis's child ? Mother's instinct said her yea. The child trotted along the Terrace to a lemon tree which had far-reaching branches, and then Jehanne saw that in one little fist she dragged after her a long rope, dark on the light marble pavement.

She could have shrieked aloud, for it was of purple silk—horror—What ?

But as the thrilling question tore her, another figure appeared, answering the call of the child's clapped hands—a gardener's boy, who knotted the rope to a strong bough so that it made a swing for her !

Then the little maiden pushing herself off with firm feet swung herself up and down, faster and faster—— Suddenly the swing rose too high—and flung its delicate burden full on the marble edge of the steps ! A tiny scarlet thread running from the golden curls showed the horror done.

Jehanne, her senses strung to topmost pitch, seemed to hear the baby lips murmur faintly : “ I was not naughty, Mama—I only took the old rope from the armoire—oh mama—mia ! ” and then—silence !

Jehanne, unable to see more, hid her face on her husband's shoulder, sobbing wildly, just as Anselme swept the curtain over the Mirror, and let in the daylight from the windows, in startled terror.

Then as Louis caught her to him, Jehanne realised that what she saw did not exist—as yet——

“ Ah, Louis beloved ! That terrible Rope—will it never cease to haunt my destiny ? I tried to save Andrea at the last, and yet this thing is now to befall ! The barons and Amaury were too quick for me—he was dead—Oh—oh—— ! ”

She shuddered, but Louis strong in his manhood and his love, kissed her on the lips.

“My foolish adored ! Naught shall hurt you while I live ! Courage, sweetheart ! We will find and burn the Rope—have this future daughter of ours watched for ever—— And as to the omen of the crown falling from my head in our triumphal procession—why that means only three other lovely children to crown our lives !

“Since we are tangled up with Ropes, you and I, I will make an Order of the Knot—make it one of the proudest Orders in Christendie ! You saw the gold cord round my throat in the Mirror ? The Knot shall be true Virtue, the bond of the Holy Spirit of Love in the Most High. I will make a Round Table of sixty Knights of the Bow, to celebrate our marriage, and will admit only the noblest and bravest thereto. The Knot of our High Desire ! So dry your tears, my Jehanne—and we will turn us towards Naples to-morrow, and when we have once gained our waiting loyal city, let Savoy come down as rebel if he will ! I will hold my wife and her Crown against the world ! Anselme, you will come with us, to cast a lucky day for my coronation ? Ah, better thus, there is sunshine again in your smile, my beloved ! Kiss me, my Desire ! I have won my Ruby Star and bound her to me by the golden Rope of Love at last ! ”

And Queen Jehanne laughed up into her King's eager eyes.

THE END

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